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## **Acknowledgements**

Many people are part of this story. The major participants are those whose personal struggles with drug and/or drug related problems have shaped the development of this community response.

Then there are those people who have served, over the ten years, on the management committees, on special sub-committees of the project, and on the staff team. Their struggle has been one of finding a way to care for this community. Their commitment, and hour upon hour of discussion and searching, has ensured a response which is vibrant, still new, and pioneering.

Many others have encouraged and supported us during the first ten years of existence: When times were rough, either through lack of money, or conflict in the ranks, doubts about direction, we had many friends who raised money, lent a sympathetic ear, and kept us going.

The fact that this account was ever put into print at all owes a great deal to our secretary Anne Marie and her “assistant” Declan. Both showed great skill in the organisation, and the typing.

Thanks Everyone!

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***We Believe That:-***

1. That Drug Addicts can and do recover.
2. Families do not have to cope on their own.
3. The Local Community is the best place for recovery.

***Our Aims Are:-***

1. To develop the community response to drug abuse.
2. To provide information/advice/support service for people caught in the cycle of drug abuse, and their families.
3. To develop preventative services, particularly in relation to young people at risk or vulnerable to drug abuse.
4. To engage in community education in drug abuse.
5. To work closely with other voluntary and statutory groups providing community services.
6. To facilitate research into drug abuse in the area.





## CHAPTER 1

### *In the beginning.....*

A new housing estate was built, despite experiences in other countries with high rise living, this new estate was designed as a high rise flats complex, with some houses. Ballymun was announced in 1964 by the Minister for local government, Neill Blaney. It would take many families off the housing list. New public housing had fallen steadily since 1955. In 1961 Dublin Corporation built 279 new houses and flats. Many people were living in unsafe unhealthy conditions - some of them were living on the streets. There was a need for new high class public housing. Ballymun was to be that. There were special interviews for prospective tenants. There was a realisation that this new styles of living would need tenants with the skills and resources to make it work, i.e. people with good jobs, a steady income, possibly a car, etc. There was an attempt to allocate these new dwellings when they were ready, to people who actually liked the idea of living in a flat - an idea which was gaining popularity in the 60's. The new estate was to house the stronger, well rooted elements of the public housing waiting list.

There was another important aspect to this new estate. These modern, high rise blocks of flats would show a "New Ireland", a go ahead Ireland, the change from rural agricultural lifestyles, to that of a dynamic modern industrialised society. There are some who claim that it is no mistake that this new estate was situated within the sight of Dublin Airport. It could be pointed out with pride to executives flying in from other countries!!!

At the planing stage, Ballymun was envisaged as a "*New and closely integrated community, enjoying from the beginning all the facilities of a new small town*"  
(*The Ballymun Project, An Objective Analysis*)

Work began on the estate in 1965, and the flats were completed in 1969. The intended population was to be 12,000 although this figure did not take into account additional housing built since then, is now estimated to be over 20,000. The plans had included a commercial town centre, meeting hall, a dance hall, a clinic, library, swimming pool, gymnasium and a small cinema.

The families came ..... Young parents, with young children. They had a lot of hope. Most families had at least one employed parent.... They had been selected to be tenants of these new luxury flats..... rents were a little bit more expensive than elsewhere, but it would be worth it to have have a beautiful new flat, with central heating, hot running water. They wouldn't know themselves!!!!!! they came from different areas of Dublin. They brought their children, and they were full of hope for a better life style.

In 1987, a local group, the SUSS Centre, described Ballymun twenty one years on, in their report “*A BLOCK OF FACTS*”.

*They said, “The casual visitor to Ballymun is immediately struck by the level of physical deprivation, especially around the flat complexes. Lifts out of order, poor lighting on stairways, vandalised flats without doors or windows, litter especially around the basement - chutes, graffiti, etc.*

*What strikes the casual visitor is a day-to-day reality for the residents of Ballymun. The general physical malaise increases the sense, within the people of Ballymun, that somewhere there is a lack of pride and interest in their community.”*

The vision did not become the reality. The hope was dashed. The promised new, dynamic lifestyle became the butt of many jokes, as the estate became the shame of the city managers and government. The best laid down plans were demolished by the urgency of the housing crisis. Instead of carefully selecting tenants to live in this environment, the priority became to get people off the housing list. The policy was changed; it became expedient instead of responsible.

The plans were never completed. Ballymun residents have had to fight for amenities to be made available. The shopping centre took a long time to be established, and is even how not maintained up to standard. The library and the swimming pool were both threatened before they were even built, had it not been for the protests by the local residents. Despite the identification as early as 1972 of a large number of transfers each year from Ballymun, many people showed great strength and commitment to their community throughout the seventies, establishing, among other things, an Irish School, and network of pre-school playgrounds.

Ballymun became known then as a place to go to “*serve your time*” until you were housed elsewhere. The attitude did not help the struggles of the residents who had committed themselves to stay and build a community. Negative media coverage gave people a bad image of the estate, before they even moved there, and many came with an attitude of minding themselves until they could get out. Without the commitment, it is hard to build a caring community. People need time to know each other, and must be able to presume a shared interest in maintaining and improving all aspects of life in their area. Also many community groups lost their very active members, because of the housing policy. They were housed elsewhere and their expertise lost to an area which badly needed their commitment.

The transience was a problem in the seventies, as was the negative image which had grown with the estate. In its short history, it had become, instead of the pride of Dublin, the area nobody wanted to move in to. And worse was to come in the eighties.

It is probably true to say that at no time did it become more obvious how badly this

young community suffered at the hands of official policy, than in the 1980's. The SUSS report of 1987 noted a slow and steady improvement which was increasing stability in the area, gave away to sudden deterioration in 1985.

They pointed out that the root of this deterioration were not in the estate itself, but in housing and social developments which affected Dublin at large. They described it as "*When Dublin sneezes, Ballymun Catches a cold.*"

Once again, there were changes in housing policy. Many corporation houses were available on a large scale, because of the rapid expansion of corporation house-building programmes in the early 1980's. These houses were available to couples with children, and led to an acceleration in the numbers leaving the estate. This in turn led to a surplus of flats becoming vacant, which was made worse by the Department of Environments £5,000 grant to local authority tenants to buy a new house, and vacate their present one. According to the SUSS centre by 30th May 1986, some 318 applications had been received from Ballymun.

Many of the empty dwellings left behind were filled, not with two parent families with employment, but by one parent families who were already experiencing social problems. To highlight the extent of this, and the resultant change in the social mix of the community, it is worth noting that in the twelve month period to the end of September, 1985, Ballymun gave accommodation to 45% of all single parents housed by Dublin corporation, even though it only accounts for some 10% of the houses available from Dublin corporation. By the end of 1986, a large number of single people (*not only single parents*) were being accommodated in Ballymun.

In July, 1986, Ballymun Task Force produced a Programme of Renewal for Ballymun. They talked about the serious social and economic crisis facing the community, and said, "*Stark, unrelieved poverty is the main factor underlying the crisis.*" Official unemployment was put at over 60%. While people who had moved out had jobs, many who moved in had no jobs. The social and economic well being of the people deteriorated rapidly. Ballymun was described as the most deprived area of the state, in the report of the Special Committee on Ballymun. Eastern Health Board, March 1984.

It was into this environment, then, of what was to become increasing powerlessness for the residents of the estate, that the Youth Action Project was born, in 1981. It was in a climate of seeping poverty and increased social isolation that the founders of the group of YAP began their work, to find a way to respond to the drug abuse which was creeping into the community - another situation of painful powerlessness for the people of Ballymun. Once again the people of the area responded to an urgent situation.

The account of the 10 year history of the Youth Action Project is an attempt to describe a process which is nowhere near finished. The danger is that such an attempt may miss much that is important, may fail to capture the struggle that has gone on, the commitment, the beauty, the disillusionment - all the ingredients of attempting to respond to such a destructive problem, with very little resources.

So, then why try? Why attempt to put it all down on paper, when that is an impossible task? For these reasons:

1. To celebrate the survival for 10 years. This is a major achievement, especially during a time of major cut backs in public spending.
2. To reflect on where we've come from, and how we've grown. It has always been part of our way of working, that we look back at what has happened, and build on that. Our past is our foundation.
3. So that other groups, perhaps where we were ten years ago, may learn from our experiences, take some hope and strength from us, and become part of the process of recovery, thus helping us in our future development.

Caution needs to be exercised in reading this account. This response to drug abuse is a dynamic living thing, rather than a static programmed way of behaving. It is educational in character, and ever changing. If some of that, even just a little is transmitted through these pages, then it will have proved a valuable exercise.

Like any other Ballymun group, we are proud of our achievements and humble in the face of work yet to be done. Throughout 1990, ten years after the situation which led to our founding, we were continually stunned by the deaths of young people we had known. This reminds us painfully not to be complacent but to remain vigilant. We have no answers but we believe we have a way a process which we hope can be shared and worked by many others as we all continue to find effective ways of making recovery possible for all our people in the 1990's and beyond.

## CHAPTER 2

### *THE YOUTH ACTION PROJECT IS BORN*



Towards the end of 1980, three young people died from drug related causes. The parents of Ballymun were frightened. There was a lot of teenagers in the area. The predominant ages in the community were children under 16, and adults in their mid twenties and forties. They were vulnerable. They faced the prospect of rising unemployment, and now drugs were on the increase.

The previous summer, two social work students did a survey. It revealed increased drug-related referrals to the local psychiatric clinic. There was also more people going into Jervis street, the National Drugs Advisory Clinic. And the local gardai reported more drug-related crimes coming to their attention.

Some people had noticed this rise in drug-related activity. Now lots of people were talking about the kids who died. Something should be done.... It has gone too far..... Who should do it....etc...etc.

Queennie Barnes, a resident of Ballymun and a mother of a young family, approached the social workers. Frank Deasy was on placement from Trinity College, under the supervision of Ineke Durville. They met Queenie, and discussed the situation. Together, Frank and Queenie set about building what was to become the Ballymun Youth Action Project They spoke to other parents. They took into account other information available to them.

For instance, consumption of prescribed drugs in the home was seen as particularly important, as separate studies have shown.

- 1) Consumption of sleeping tablets and tranquillisers is directly related to rising

unemployment. (*T.C.D. Pharmaceutical DEPT.*)

2) Availability of drugs in the home creates opportunities for experimentation by young people, predisposing them to further abuse when drugs are available locally.  
(*Jervis Street Drugs Advisory Clinic*)

They talked about drug abuse becoming part and parcel of the community life, ranging from children abusing cough bottles and solvents, to teenagers abusing barbiturates and tranquilliser drugs with alcohol, through to the abuse of injectable opiates by hard core addicts. The abuse of prescribed drugs and alcohol by adults was also seen as part of the problem.

Fears were increased by the escalation of heroin trafficking and addiction in similar vulnerable communities in other parts of Dublin. These communities, like Ballymun, have been characterised by high unemployment, lack of social and recreational facilities, over crowding and sub-standard housing conditions. The problem was seen as being compounded by the fact that people with problems, including drug and alcohol related problems were increasingly tending to “end up” in Ballymun, an estate with low housing points requirements.

The discussion at that time concluded that, while abuse had been on the increase, it had followed the pattern of most other estates in that supply wasn't organised and mainly of the barbiturate/tranquillisers and pharmaceutical opiate variety obtained by chemist robbery or by false prescription. However, widespread availability of prescribed drugs in the area and the massive pressures faced by the community, left young people in the area wide open to the type of heroin epidemic being experienced in similar communities. In time, this fear proved correct.

So it was in this context that three public meetings were held with speakers from Ballymun Psychiatric Clinic, The National Drugs Advisory Centre at Jervis Street, Stanhope Street Alcoholism Centre, The Alcoholic Rehabilitation Centre Campaign and other local groups. These meetings considered the range of drugs available to the community, and groups using them, and were attended by parents and teenagers. A final meeting was held to develop and organise community alternatives to drug taking.

(*see appendix 1 for programme for these first meetings*)

The Youth Action Project arose from this meeting, with direction to proceed in three areas.

1. The needs of the whole youth population on a community - wide basis, growing up in a situation of rising unemployment and an absence of social facilities.
2. The specific needs of drug abusing youth, their families and friends.

3. The need for preventative community education in relation to drug use and increased awareness of relationships affecting the community's development.

A further meeting elected a committee of thirteen people - seven adults and six teenagers. In examining local needs and patterns of abuse, the group set about evolving a local community response to drug abuse.

### ***BALLYMUN TAKES RESPONSIBILITY***

The search is a search for change which makes a difference - change which will ensure as far as possible that the children will grow up healthy and happy, with choices about what they do with their lives.

The understanding of this founding group was colossal. In effect what they were saying by their actions was *"We don't have an easy answer. We don't know what to do. Neither do the experts. But together we can work at it."*

They saw that a different approach was needed. They did not merely look to the statutory agencies to provide services. They looked to their own community, a community beset with major problems which were outside their control, and they BELIEVED that a way forward could be found. They decided that things did not have to stay the way they were, that change could, and would happen. But it would come from within, not from outside. They took the responsibility of helping that change to happen, and they got involved. Their sense of hopelessness and fear became the foundation for change and growth. No longer were they going to shrug their shoulders, and just allow their people to die.

This process has been witnessed in many individuals who had drug/alcohol problems, and managed to turn destruction into positive action, and change their lives. Groups like Narcotics Anonymous have written down how they managed to become drug free, and stay drug free. And their first step towards this tells us that they had to admit they were powerless over their addiction, and that life had become unmanageable. The ADMISSION had to be there first - I'm beaten. I've had it, I can't do this. I can't stay off booze, pills, smack, or whatever else.

These groups tell us then, about their amazement to discover that this very experience, which seemed the end of the road, seemed so destructive, was the very one which became the bedrock of their success.

This process is also described for us by people like Paulo Freire who worked among oppressed communities in Brazil. He claims that out of this *"weakness"* springs power, and it is only this power, coming from the weakness of the oppressed, which is

strong enough to free not only the oppressed themselves, but also the oppressors. Victor Frankl writes about what can happen to us when we are faced with insurmountable odds.

The challenge he says, when we are no longer able to change a situation (*the example he gives is an incurable disease*) is to change ourselves. Harry M Tiebout, a great friend of Alcoholics Anonymous, described it as an act of surrender, which initiated the switch from negative to positive.

So, in Ballymun, the admissions by those early founders of the Youth Action Project, that they didn't have an answer, that they didn't know what to do BUT that they would search for one. set the scene, for what has developed as a creative revolutionary response to drug abuse.

It is a response which says that we are all involved, that we all need to change. Unlike a purely treatment oriented approach, or law and order one, it doesn't leave all the responsibility on the addicts to change. This is not only an individual response.

In the Youth Action Project, from its very earliest days, the problem was seen as both personal and systemic - it affects members of the community as individuals, and it affects, and is affected by, the system as a whole. How the system responds to this problem in its midst is crucial in determining the development of the problem. The interaction can be destructive, or constructive.

This concept is described more fully later on in this account. Suffice it to say here that it is our contention

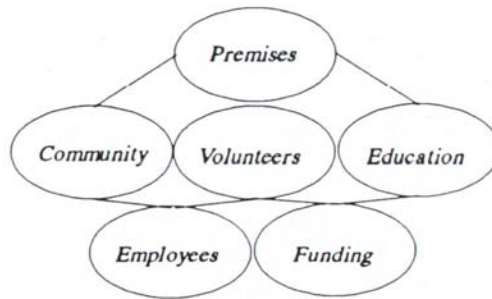
*THAT WHATEVER THE VARIABLES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE ONSET OF ADDICTION, THE RESPONSES OF THE COMMUNITY ARE CRUCIAL IN DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT SOMEONE REMAINS ADDICTED.*

Right from the beginning the members of the Youth Action Project have struggled to change reactions born of fear and condemnation, to truly caring, constructive responses which can create a climate of growth and confidence. Ten Years On, this is still our major focus.



## CHAPTER 3

### *EARLY DEVELOPMENT*



The early problems were many. It was all very well to have the enthusiasm, and the will to get involved, but the practical problems threatened to kill the initiative off before it got really going. The group had no money or premises to meet in.

It is a measure of the determination, good spirit, willingness and commitment evident in this group, that the Project survived at all through this early stage. It took 18 months for the group to get its own premises, in the form of a small, one-roomed flat, allocated to them by Dublin Corporation. During that 18 months they met every week wherever they could find a room. This was more difficult in Ballymun then than it is now. The community was made up of flats, houses, a shopping centre, school and churches. There were no established meeting places for groups to use. Community work in the area was in its infancy, and with no old buildings, or established groups, meeting was difficult. Referred to later years as the “homeless time”, it was a test of endurance to those involved. Credit, and thanks must be extended to those who helped the group through this period, among them the Playgroup Association, and the clergy, for the use of their premises. It is probably true to say that, but for the investment of the community people, who had an awful lot to lose if change did not come about, and still held the fear of their children dying from drug overdoses, this new initiative would not have survived the practical trials of those first 18 months.

During this time, proposals were submitted to various bodies for funding, a parent effectiveness training programme was held, links were made with existing treatment services, and the group had begun to make its presence felt. They had also spent a great deal of time considering the problem they were dealing with. This was a crucial activity for the long term survival of the Project. The worth of this kind of reflection is borne out by the findings of Ronald D Wynne, Ph.D, who was asked to study community Drug Abuse Programmes in the United States in the early seventies. He found that there had been very varied levels of effectiveness and success among

the programmes studied, but concluded that the more successful ones had, at some level, carefully considered the nature and context of the problem with which they were dealing. The continued consideration by those involved in the Project, of the nature of the problem, has probably been a major factor in its development in spite of great difficulties.

The founders of the Youth Action Project also did not forget that when the response began, there was nowhere for local people to go and find out about drugs, how you would know if your child was using etc., etc. The Drugs Advisory Clinic was in town, and nobody went there, until they were daily users, injecting opiates. It was crucial to make information, links with agencies available locally.



Having been allocated 1A Balcouris Road from Dublin Corporation and having made the place habitable it was immediately opened on a Monday night for advice/information on drug abuse, referral, and support. Having spent some time considering the nature of the problem they were dealing with, the committee as it now stood (*10 people in all*) were keenly aware of the need to learn as much as possible about drug addiction, and to start educating the community about it.

With money that had been raised they decided to undertake a training course, and I was involved to have some input on drug addiction and alcoholism. All of the committee took part in this training programme, which ran for 8 - 10 sessions. The committee had also been approached by local youth club leaders and school guidance counsellors, for some education on the subject.

At this stage in the development of any group dealing with drug/alcohol related problems, important decisions are made when it comes to education. Many groups talk of education. It is seen, and properly so as an important tool in making effective responses. However there are no absolutes when it comes to the content of an educational programme. Ten such programmes may have ten different content areas, such is the complexity of drug addiction.

On reflection with the members who undertook that early programme, it is believed a corner stone was laid then. The group asked for education on drug addiction, how it progresses, how it effects individuals, and families, and what help is available. They wanted to know more about the person who came through 1A door, either strung out themselves, or living with a family who was. Thus the programme was based around the model of addiction being a primary disorder, not being predictable but recognisable, describable and very importantly recoverable! Again, doing this, the group were practising what the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous had done. These early AA members didn't know what CAUSED them to drink uncontrollably, but they set about working on what they did know, and learning about their alcoholism. The committee at that time did something similar.

They set about learning about the existing addiction which was in their community, and finding out how to respond to that. They wanted to make recovery more possible in their area.

The group were to say, after that programme, that it had brought them together, and given them a structure to work with. It made sense to them. They knew about living with addiction and alcoholism, and it gave them confidence to be able to understand and describe it so well. It was now May, 1983. The group was two years in existence.

In a proposal for resources drawn up at that time, the group outlined their objectives this way:

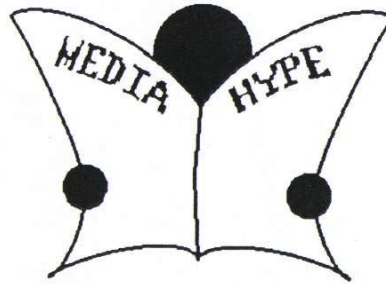
*"In this approach, we see the primary problem facing the individual abuser and his/her family as one of addiction and seek to develop community based supports. In terms of the wider community we seek to develop the awareness, skills and resources necessary to cope with and prevent the escalation of drug abuse as a community problem."*

### ***MEANWHILE, IN OTHER PARTS OF DUBLIN***

While this group work had been going on in Ballymun, elsewhere in Dublin the issue of drug abuse, heroin abuse in particular, had erupted. Despite representations by doctors, social workers, community workers, and other concerned people, in the late 70's and into 1980, and despite mounting evidence of increased heroin use in Dublin, there was no move to respond by the public authorities. It was the summer of 1982 before the Department of Health commissioned the Medico - Social Research Board (*now amalgamated with the Medical Research Council, and called the Health Research Board*) to conduct a full investigation into the extent of heroin use in Ireland.

This report appeared first in April 1983, and showed that drug addiction was worse in a north inner city area of Dublin, than in known high prevalent districts in New York, Public concern was growing rapidly. The National Drug Advisory Center in Jervis Street made a plea for more resources - figures showed a 246 percent increase in the number of patients over the past year. The government set up a Ministerial Task Force to look into the problem, which reported in September 1983.

The media focused a lot of attention on the drugs problem. RTE's "*Today Tonight*" programme broadcast two major programmes on drugs. The Youth Action Project had been in existence for two years. They had reflected on the context with which they were dealing. They were in a position to make a submission, written followed by oral, to the ministerial Task Force. They pushed the community concept, designing their submission around their belief that any effective response had to belong to the local community in any area.



They were approached by many media people, hungry for a different angle on the drugs issue, looking for a new headline, a new scandal. The temptation to "*get is on the act*" was great; the publicity might bring the much needed resources, the project could get recognition as the first approach of its kind in the 26 counties; the authorities could not ignore them if they hit the headlines, etc., etc. But, as has been

the way of the people involved in this group, each issue was discussed fully by-the whole group, and decisions were made based, not on recognition or short term gain, but on the effect any actions would have on the aims of the Project. It was decided that no one person would speak on behalf of the group, there would always be two. This was one way of safeguarding misrepresentation by journalists, seen only as interested in Ballymun for a quick story. The group realised, as did many Ballymun groups, the damage that such reporting can do their community, and were very careful in their dealings with journalists. *"Today Tonight"* had a particularly bad reputation with the group, because they deliberately ignored the Project's analysis of the situation in Ballymun, and engaged in setting up sensationalist scenes which they had been specifically asked not to focus on. It was a case of good community work clashing with what was being promoted as the kind of broadcasting people would take notice of. As a result of this, the Project refused to co-operate in the making of the major *"Today Tonight"* broadcast on drugs, and did not appear on them.

The issue of the supply of drugs, which had become organised and which was the major focus of public and official concern, was a difficult one for the Project to handle. They had been set up to respond to the needs of drug abusers, their families, and those at risk. They were actively pursuing various bodies for money to employ a full time worker to build a counselling/information and support service. Discussions of the group's attitude to the supply of drugs had to be put into context. Any attempt to glean information about the supply was likely to kill the counselling function before it even got on its feet. In the addiction field, this is one of the difficulties faced by workers and agencies. Any rumour at all that the agency is passing on information can be very damaging to the counselling service. Therefore, the Youth Action Project decided that their major focus was on the demand for the drugs, rather than the supply. In any case, the analysis of the situation had shown that the illegal supply of drugs was but one problem in the overall situation.

Padraig Yeats and Sean Flynn accurately portrayed the picture when, in their book *"Smack"* published in 1985, they said *"The problem long predates the advent of heroin in Dublin. If, and when, the heroin problem is eliminated in Dublin there will still be a drugs abuse crisis in Ballymun. Glue sniffing and cider drinking are prevalent amongst school children while tranquillisers, barbiturates and alcohol are consumed on a large scale by many adults."*

Once again, the members of the committee had shown themselves to be willing to make decisions based on the long term goals of the project, and forego any short term attention which may damage the continued growth of their work.

During this time, the group also made a submission to the Eastern Health Board Special Committee on Ballymun, which reported in March 1984. The committee described Ballymun as the most deprived community in the state, YET they also drew

attention to the co-operation and commitment which had gone into the submissions made to them by many groups in the area. *"Members were impressed by the trouble lakes by many to have their suggestions and ideas heard. This willingness can only augur well for the future of the Ballymun Community."*

#### **A NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS MEETING STARTS.**

In the meantime, while the group prepared submissions, made proposals for funding made decisions about direction through all the hype about drug abuse, went to meetings with public representatives, etc., etc. 1A (*the premises*) opened every Monday night, for advice/information on drug abuse. One of the first to come for help was a young wife and mother whose husband was involved in the drugs scene.

Due largely to her commitment and willingness to accept help, her husband also eventually came with her. He started to go to Narcotics Anonymous, a self help programme for addicts, based on the same 12 steps as the Alcoholics Anonymous programme. He became drug free. He found in Narcotics Anonymous, a way to live without using drugs. He wanted other people in Ballymun to have that opportunity. With the help of other NA members from all over Dublin, he established a meeting in the Project premises, every Thursday night. It was the first NA meeting on the northside of Dublin, and has continued since then. This was greeted with great enthusiasm. Small it may be, but this meeting was a sign that recovery was happening in Ballymun, within the community, for those searching for it. The Youth Action Project still met on a voluntary capacity, every week, opened every Monday night for advice/information and support, had no telephone, no funds and no full time staff.

The committee was now made up of 10 people. 3 men, 7 women. It consisted of 5 local people, 2 nuns, both resident in the community, 1 volunteer (*social worker; not limy or working in Ballymun*) 1 Eastern Health Board Community worker, and 1 probation officer.

Two important tasks had to be done - a constitution had to be finalised and a job description for the proposed full time worker had to be drawn up. The first constitution of the Project was completed early in 1984, and laid down the name, aims/objectives of the project, outlined how it would be managed, the tasks of the management committee, the holding of the AGM each year, and voting rights. By drawing up such guidelines for their functioning, the committee were building on the commitment and investment of the founder members, ensuring the continuity of the Project, and laying principles down for its functioning. The Project was not to depend on personalities but on the guidelines laid down in the constitution. The aims and objectives were decided upon, and have remained the focus of our work. The committee was aware, also, of the need for personnel on the committee to change, and the dangers of allowing members to carry on indefinitely, perhaps stifling the growth and development. They therefore laid down that the maximum term of office be 3

years. This was to be amended later, when we became a company limited by guarantee. To take into account the very slow pace of community work, and the value of members whose confidence may be just beginning to grow, this became that 1/3 of the committee resigned each year, but were eligible for re-election, until they had served 6 years on the committee. After that length of time, they are not eligible for re-election.

The constitution also laid down the role of the Project re employers, and the number of staff who could serve on the committee. This group were not asking statutory agencies to provide staff, they were asking for funds to employ their own staff. The Youth Action Project would be the employers, and carry the responsibilities of that.

The plans at this stage were to employ a full time worker by Jan'84. The Ministerial Task Force, which the group had met earlier in '83. had referred the Youth Action Project to the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Labour (*since transferred to the Dept. of Education.*) There were high hopes that money could be provided to employ someone soon, and the pressure was to pin down just exactly what a full time worker would be doing. The hopes then were that Frank Deasy, who had remained involved in the Project since it was founded and who had consistently encouraged and steered them as the energy flagged, would apply for the full time post when the money became available.

However, these hopes were not realised, and when January arrived, into yet another year, there was no move on any allocation of money from anywhere. (*It was over a year later, in April, '85 that a full time worker, funded by Youth Affairs, finally started work.*) The group sagged a lot at this time. There was conflict about the roles in the group.

The Health Board Community Worker wanted to resign, to work with other younger groups, as she felt that the project was well on its way to stability. Others disagreed. They questioned - had she the right to resign? She was the only one there who was involved as part of her job - everyone else was there voluntarily. This dispute came hot on the heels of the disappointment that a worker was not yet appointed, and difficulties over the job description of the worker. The value of staffing the advice/information centre was questioned - would a workers time not be better spent out doing other things? The discussion flew back and forth, over a few weeks, and many fears surfaced. The reality of becoming employers was hitting home; there was fear that everything was going to collapse; there was discouragement that little had been achieved for 3 years work. This was a difficult time, and continued for most of 1984.

However, the group did not collapse, and learned valuable lessons. They learned that, even though there may be conflict, the job has to be done. A decision was made to get

on with the business, with the knowledge that the conflict would have to be faced up to, and dealt with. Plans had been made to run public meetings and once again I was part of these plans. I was to go to Ballymun on placement from a course on adult and community education, and help organise these public meetings. As such I was the first full time student placement in the Project, and they still had no employee!! It is a measure of the maturity of the group that I was made so welcome at such a difficult time, and that they were prepared to face public meetings while so much of their ideology, vision and ground work was being questioned.

Their achievement began to show when we started planning the public education campaign. They quickly identified their need to lay a STRONG FOUNDATION through COMMUNITY EDUCATION. They saw this happening through groups coming together to SHARE INFORMATION and IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS.

This would be the underlying aim of the on going community education programme. Much discussion was taking place about

- A) the direction of the Project.
- B) the role of the worker
- C) relationships with other groups in the community.

This questioning took a lot of time and was of vital importance.



## CHAPTER 4

### ***BACK TO THE PEOPLE.....***

The energy level rose considerably with the decision to go ahead with the public meetings. Some enthusiasm returned. The underlying aim to lay a strong foundation had been quickly and early identified, but deciding on the content of the meetings took a bit longer. It is very easy to lose sight of original aims and go off in various directions. However, as always, what were seen as the basic needs of the people of Ballymun won the day. Agreement was made to keep the content to education on the progression of drug addiction, the early signs and symptoms, the effect on the family, family responses and where to get help. Addiction was kept as the main focus, since various forms of addiction were evident in the community, and many people were living with this.

The group realised that a lot of families needed help, as much as those addicted. We wanted to let people know that family members could recover from the devastation of addiction, and that help was available for them. We set out to promote family recovery, as much as recovery for addicts.

During this discussion, we began to identify a two-pronged approach. The first one was an approach to the existing addiction in the community, and the second the building of alternative activities and lifestyles. This fitted in with the philosophy that the community system was crucial in determining whether or not the addicts would remain addicted. By educating people about the addiction already there, helping them to identify whether their reactions were destructive or constructive, and promoting recovery for everybody, not just addicts, from the pain and fear of addiction, then alternatives would be built from that recovery process.

There was a big howl of laughter and excitement at the meeting when these ideas became clear. One of the members shouted "*We're talking about community RECOVERY here. It's great - everything else will happen if we get it across!!!*" It seemed so simple!! And it is simple - but hard to do!!

Anyway the needs of the people were finally identified as:

1. raising the level of awareness of addiction process, not only of the than drugs themselves;
2. recognising enabling responses by family and community, in the addiction process;
3. knowing where to get help.

The laying down of these needs so clearly, has served as a major guideline for all subsequent educational work. We aim, wherever possible through schools programmes, workshops etc., to work consistently in meeting the needs identified early in 1984.

We decided that the best way to involve as much of the community as possible in this programme would be to make an effort to get more people (*residents and professionals*) to come to the public meetings, and meet smaller groups in between times to discuss their particular interests and problems. This model which took shape was one which had a cyclical movement, moving from the Youth Action Project to the public, to smaller groups within the community, back to the Youth Action Project, and public meetings, (*appendix 2*) Through this it was hoped to promote the existing self help groups in the area for recovery from addiction/alcoholism and hopefully facilitate the setting up of the ones not meeting in Ballymun. It was also hoped to establish relationships within the community and investigate what structures could be established for working together on this issue, making it as much a TOTAL response as possible. This public education programme was deliberately designed around a theme of HOPE not FEAR.

This particular programme is being described in some detail here, as it was an important milestone in the development of the Youth Action Project. It gave the group something concrete to work on, at a time of great doubt and questioning, and it greatly helped, as it progressed through the four weeks, to clarify the role of the Youth Action Project in the area. The group spoke of backing up the self help groups, and getting larger premises to help those in recovery to build alternatives to a drug abusing life style. People began to look beyond the meetings, to the follow up. However, what that was to be was still in the melting pot.

The feedback from this programme was very positive, and the main objectives had been met. Many contacts were made, and doors opened. However, now it was up to the Youth Action Project to go through these doors! The community education programme had only just began!

In the immediate period after these meetings, the group were very happy with the outcome, which were beyond expectations.

They were:

- a) A core group of 40 had come each night,
- b) Families Anonymous a self help group for family members, were meeting in the Project's premises;
- c) A small number of people had sought personal help through the meetings;
- d) A date was set for a volunteers meeting;
- e) Many new contacts had been made with people working with others; The ground was laid for further planning.

A lot of time and energy had been taken up by this programme and the committee meetings had suffered as a result. After the programme, they needed breathing space. It was a time to reflect, talk and enjoy the impact the programme had made on

everyone. Spirits were raised, there was more hope and clarity now.

It seems that a number of important lessons can be learned from that time, about surviving in community work through difficult phases.

1. THE GROUP WERE WILLING TO TAKE A RISK. AT A TIME WHEN INDIVIDUALS WERE IN CONFLICT;
2. THE CONFLICT WAS OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGED;
3. THEY WELCOMED THE INVOLVEMENT OF AN OUTSIDE PROFESSIONAL, AND CO-OPERATED FULLY;
4. ONCE THE DECISION WAS MADE TO LEAVE THE DISAGREEMENTS TO ONE SIDE FOR A WHILE, THE GROUP COULD FOCUS ON THE "GOAL". RATHER THAN THEIR DIFFERENCES. THIS ALSO MEANT THAT THE ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN WAS RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

This educational programme helped the group move forward, and become "*unstuck*". At the end of the programme, the numbers involved had almost doubled. It was no longer one committee with a couple of clients on a Monday nights. It was now a committee, a volunteers group, a part time worker and clients. (*Following the programme, the group had asked me to stay on and work a few hours per week. to co-ordinate some follow up. This was made possible by a grant allocated at the time.*) Clearer communication lines had opened up with other agencies and groups in the community, and it became even more essential to have a full time, trained employee and bigger premises, to allow maximum growth. External resources were needed for continued effectiveness. And that has always been one of the most difficult parts of our work. Resources have been slow to come. We haven't always been able to capitalise our initiatives, because of lack of manpower, or money.

### ***"A BIG GRANT COMES IN!!!!"***

In 1984, the group did not have much money. They received a grant of £4,000 from the Ireland Fund. Decisions had to be made about how to spend that money. It could have gone on equipment, activities, premises or any number of valid places. The decision was that it would go on manpower. NO longer could they wait, it was said, for government to follow up on their statements made in the Task Force report (*one year earlier*). They needed somebody NOW to co-ordinate the work, and develop the service. A parttime position was offered to me, 20 hours per week, which I accepted when I returned from a summer job in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (*This experience was also to prove significant to the Project as 3 of our young staff members have since spent time there, receiving training in adolescent chemical dependency.*)

Being financially able to offer a part time position to somebody trained in addiction counselling and education, greatly alleviated some of the fears of the group. The

Health Board community worker resigned then, to work with newer groups. Y.A.P. was now three and half years old - it was well established.

Frank, who had originally intended to work for the group when a position became vacant, had moved on to other things, which took him away from this possibility. He still remained, however, a very active member of the committee. There was a danger that expectations would be too high, now that a worker was employed. Some work had to go into this, and the responsibilities and roles of employee and committee.

During that summer verification came from Youth Affairs, that the Project was to be allocated £12,000 to put a worker "*on the streets*". The minister was George Birmingham. The money came from "*discretionary funding*", in other words, it was not from the regular budget which was allocated to various youth bodies every year. It was from extra money which he could choose to allocate wherever he wanted. The committee were delighted to get the money, but thought it odd that an area which had been among the "*priorities*" of the Task Force on Drug Abuse, was allocated money from discretionary funding. It wasn't seen as making much of a commitment. However, Youth Affairs have continued to support the Project since then, raising the grant to £20,000 in later years.

At last, things could start moving.

But - they didn't move that fast! The grant was to be processed to us through Comhairle Le Leas Oige, the national youth body of the Vocational Education Committee. This was because the minister did not have the power to allocate directly to a small group such as ours. It had to come through a national body. Problems ensued in the communication with Comhairle Le Leas Oige for the forwarding of the funds to us. The conditions being laid down were unacceptable to the committee as they took major decisions from their hands, and gave them to an outside body. This was contrary to the process of community development, and recovery. The matter was finally resolved by a meeting with the minister who also confirmed that Comhairle Le Leas Oige was an accounting agency for this money, and had DO role in the management of the Project. Thus began the relationship with this agency, which has had its up and downs over the years! Similar issues were to arise again in 1988, when we were allocated funds from The National Lottery. This time it wasn't so easy to resolve, which will be discussed later. Suffice it to say at the moment that, in 1984, this issue took up a lot of valuable time and energy, when much other work had to be done. It delayed the appointment of the worker until the following April, 1985. But it had to be so. It was an issue around the basic principle for any community group - that of determining important things for themselves, and not being imposed upon from outside.

In the intervening few months, two more people had resigned, a community development course had begun in Ballymun which included members of the Project 20

committee with people from other community groups, and some of the volunteers had dropped out.

### ***FIND NEW PEOPLE***

The committee now had more professional people than locals 5 as against 3 locals. 2 of the professional were nuns, Little Sisters of the Assumption, who lived in Ballymun Also included was the coordinator, who came from outside the area. There was a fear that it was falling apart - some people had left, and those who were involved were very busy. Some had by now given three and a half years service to the project. The administration of the work was slow, due to people's commitments, and practical difficulties, e.g. we had no telephone or typewriter. There were other problems, too, like for instance people undertaking tasks, then not carrying them through. This is mentioned, not as any specific criticism, but as very real issue in community development work. Sometimes people involved in projects lack confidence in themselves, and have to learn to assess their resources to perform a task, before agreeing to take it on. All of this is crucial work, but it is work that is rarely seen by those outside the group, or the funding bodies. How can you quantify this? How can you assess this valuable function of any community group? It's on going work, and it sometimes can't be planned for - it happens when least expected, and usually at busy times!! The temptation is to ignore it, get on with the task, let someone else do it. But this is not always the most productive way forward. The growth and development of the individuals depends on challenging this, providing the training necessary, and supporting them as they acquire the necessary confidence. This can be difficult for a Project like ours, which is providing a specific service for people in great need of our attention. It can be very frustrating to spend time on issues which arise. Indeed it has become more difficult as the Project grows, and the service spreads to more people. Difficult and frustrating as it is, it is none-the-less crucial for the long term survival of the principles that this work is carried out We have always been aware of this, primarily because of the awareness of the people who served during the early years, and the risks they took to challenge one another. Sometimes, though, we have fallen short of the ideal in responding" Sometimes things are left on the back burner, because we are so pressurised with other issues. BUT, issues like these do not stay on the back burner for too long - they always boil over again, and have to be faced. One of the hallmarks of the YAP committee had been its ability to face issues which threaten the survival of the group, or the meeting of the aims, and take necessary action. They can indeed place principles before personalities.

The experience, skills and commitment of the professional people involved played a major role in the development of the group, as it struggled to keep the enthusiasm, and involve more, interested local people.

## HEADHUNT



Getting more local people involved was no easy task. Now, at the end of 1984, going into another year, we needed people who knew about our work, who understood about addiction, and who had the skills to be part of the management and development of the fast growing Project. In Ballymun, this was particularly difficult because of the transience of the community. Many community leaders were housed outside the area, in places like Tallaght and Blanchardstown. One local priest referred to these people once as "*our graduates*". They have gone on to be productively involved in their new communities. For YAP, the effect of this reality really hit home when a young couple who had been involved for over two years, and who were possible future committee members, were housed in Clondakin. It was a big blow. They would, like many others, have preferred to stay in Ballymun, but they had small children and preferred a house to a flat. This is an issue which has consistently been raised with Dublin Corporation, by local groups.

In conjunction with these difficulties, positive feedback was coming in from other agencies about the work being done, and recognition was happening. The Health Education Bureau, for example had approached us to host 3 pilot educational project for agents on drug related issues. Records show a variety of work being undertaken, from Oct 1st '84 - Dec 21st '84, a period of less than 3 months.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS	6
EXTRA MEEINGS	2 (D.S. Jobs & Application)
ADVICE AND INFORMATION	14 Monday nights (since September) 12 Wednesday afternoons
COUNSELLING SESSIONS	7
HOME VISITS	3
YOUTH CLUB VISITS	2

SCHOOL VISITS	5
INTERVIEWS (Journalists etc.)	4
MEETINGS (Planning team for HEB; Social Work etc.)	6
EDUCATION SESSIONS	13
CASE CONFERENCE	1

In the meantime, an ad had gone in the national press, for the vacancy of full time project worker. A decision was made to keep me on part time, as coordinator, and employ a new person with the Youth Affairs Grant. By December we had 25 applicants for the post, and the process of selecting those for interview had begun.

A new lease of life was evident going into 1985, with the arrival of three new volunteers on the committee. All were participants on the Community Leadership Course, and two had been involved in our volunteers group. Their enthusiasm gave everyone a boost, and they were very keen to make being drug free a possibility for young people in Ballymun. At this time, the value of employing community development principles became really evident, as this group settled in to accepting the responsibilities of being employers, and developing their very own community response to drug abuse. It had been a slow and difficult process but the group had succeeded in

KEEPING THE RESPONSE ALIVE,

INTERGRATING LOCAL AND PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE,

RETAINING THEIR AUTONOMY OVER THEIR OWN AFFAIRS,

LOBBYING FOR SOME RESOURCES TO BE MADE AVAILABLE,

HIGHLIGHTING THE DRUGS RELATED ISSUES IN BALLYMUN AND BECOMING EMPLOYERS.

## **“GET BACK”**

Then, in the throes of the activity and excitement about the full time position came an unexpected setback. Out of the blue, the group learned of the appointment of a drugs counsellor by the Eastern Health Board, who was to work from the local health centre. This news was greeted with incredulity when the group first heard it. Surely this wouldn't happen without SOME contact from the Health Board? However, this is exactly how it happened, there was no contact; it seemed to be snap a decision, taken without any thought or planning and certainly without considering local conditions at the time. This action was perceived at the time as an attempt to carve out the Youth Action Project, who advertised nationally for a full time worker, who would be responsible, not to the Health Board, but to a local voluntary group. Yet the group felt it had done good public relations work with the Health Board, informing them of the aims, and make up of the group, making a submission to the EHB special committee on Ballymun in 1983, and submitting proposals for funding for a co-ordinator. The central issues were

- a) no consultation with the local response, which now had four years experience of the situation on the ground and involved people directly affected;
- b) the EHB putting workers in isolation, where there was already a local drugs group.

The group responded to this action by seeking a meeting to clarify the role of the health board worker, and to record our disappointment at not being informed even, far less consulted. Eventually, through use of the media and local representatives, a delegation was met by the programme manager, and two others with responsibilities in the drugs area. The health board had been appointing counsellors to other areas of the city, since 1983. There seemed to be no structure or organisation about the appointments. The workers did not have job descriptions, and there was confusion about their accountability.

The group asserted their authority, and their rights, when they faced this meeting. The officials claimed no knowledge of YAP, despite a submission made (“...*but they made it through a different department.....*”) and the presence at the meeting of Dr Michael Kelly of Jervis Street Drugs Clinic, whose staff had given support and who had been involved in individual cases. At the meeting, the programme manager asserted the health board duty to supply services, and asked if YAP would be interested in forming a working relationship. The YAP representatives responded that we had been seeking such a working relationship for a long time, and that the way this new appointment had been made was not a basis for forming a good co-operative relationship, to benefit the people of Ballymun. At no time did YAP refuse to work with the person employed, on individual cases, and indeed we have played a major role in supporting individuals who have held this position. However, a working relationship at policy making level hasn't become a reality as yet.



Facing this situation, and handling it responsibly and competently, was an important exercise for the group. In a letter responding to the correspondence from YAP to the media, a group from Kerry commended the actions of the group, pointing out that we were seeking to influence policy, and have a say in what happened in our own community, by doing what we did. This is the kernel of such actions. They are about having a say - not having a GO at someone!!

The EHB worker was subsequently invited to committee meeting, and to our Inter Agency Network Meetings. He learned about the concept of a community response from the group, and about powerlessness in the Ballymun Community. From YAP, a voluntary group, he learned about the integrated approach, and the balance of community work and social work. Since then, we have worked in co-operation with those who have been in the EHB position, and have admired the skill and commitment of these workers.

Meanwhile the interviews for our new worker had taken place. Declan Reddy was appointed, and began work in April 1985. Declan had no formal, third level education, but he came to us with experience of working in HOPE, a hostel for homeless adolescents boys, and a natural gift for establishing relationships with young people. This was a time of great buoyancy and hope. Conducting the interviews had been a positive experience. The interview panel was made up of 2 local people, 1 professional person and the co-ordinator. This has been the way most of our work has been conducted - through a combination of local knowledge and professional expertise. One compliments the other.

At long last, four years after it was founded, the Project had a daily presence in the community. Practical issues were problematic (*we still operated from the one roomed small flat orginally allocated*), we still had no phone, etc., etc. Money was still a big problem - the wages and PRSI for one full time worker and one part time worker ate up most of the funds. However, the work continued, contacts were strengthened, and new ones made. Of course, what was discovered, and is still being discovered, was that the work being done brought in yet more work which needed attention!! Investigations were made about using government schemes, such as the Social Employment Scheme and Teamwork. The ideas behind these applications were that the schemes would provide more personnel, employ local people and build up skills and expertise among local people. Training for carrying out Project work was to be built in to the schemes. In September '85 the group met for a day in the Spanish Convent, Finglas to discuss roles within the Project, the direction of the Project, and to air concerns and grievances which hadn't been possible to do at regular meetings. An outside facilitator was brought in for this meeting, so that everyone could take part.

## **WE DECIDE TO “SCHEME”.**

By October of 1985, 2 SES workers had started work and 6 teamworkers. All were local people. Some had been involved in the Project, others had heard of it, and others knew nothing about it. These people were to be involved in maintenance, manning the drop in centre when it opened, secretarial work, etc. By that time, the group had been allocated another flat in Thomas Clarke Tower, which offered more space for meetings, training and counselling, activities, etc.

So, we had gone from 1 part time coordinator at the beginning of the year, to 10 employees in all by the end of the year!

Naturally this rate of expansion took up a lot of time and energy, and there were many disagreements and fights about how all this was to be organised. The schemes did enable us to expand our activities considerably, particularly in relation to the 12 - 15 age group. The drop in centre (*in a basement in Sillogue Road at that time*) opened at specific times for this age group, and the young workers set about establishing and maintaining relationships with these teenagers, whom we had identified as being highly at risk of developing serious drug problems. To date, many of those young people still keep regular contact with the Project.

However, the nature of our work, and the temporary structure of the schemes, made it very difficult to consolidate the expansion. Naturally, the workers were dissatisfied with the small wages paid on the schemes, and were angry about the possibility of being let go after the year was up, as those were the conditions of the schemes. They felt that they would just be acquiring the confidence and the skills to be more effective, and they would be back on the dole again. This did not encourage the extra effort and commitment needed in our line of work, although most worked very hard in spite of this. It has also been a feature of our kind of work, when you are dealing with very hurt and wounded individuals, that the level of intensity can reach a high pitch. This, in turn shows up all the hidden personal difficulties of the staff and committee. It is widely recognised that such areas will show up in the course of the work, and have to be dealt with. In some instances, this can lead to further growth and development of those concerned and make for better, more effective helpers.

However, sometimes the difficulties are too great and cannot be healed while still continuing to work. In these instances people have to leave, for the benefit of everyone. The Youth Action Project, no more than anywhere else, has not been immune to personal difficulties on the staff and committee, and caring efforts have been made to support those in difficulty. Our teamwork and SES scheme were no exceptions. The personal problems of some of the participants was also a factor in the difficulties encountered in implementing the schemes.

been made to support those in difficulty. Our teamwork and SES scheme were no exceptions. The personal problems of some of the participants was also a factor in the difficulties encountered in implementing the schemes.

Eventually in September of '86, the committee made a decision not to use these schemes any more, but to put our efforts into acquiring funds to employ those who had shown ability to be effective, and who were interested in staying on. A campaign was launched, with two other community groups also using schemes, the SUSS centre and Base 10. However, the Department of Labour did not discuss our proposal for a follow up to Teamwork, which we had all put forward as suggestions for development of that scheme. It is regrettable that, once again, a government agency did not see fit to use the creative energies and talents of those on the ground, who were struggling hard to make the schemes useful tools for the development of their work. A three month extension of the scheme was granted, and it is with pride that we can say in YAP that we still have employed three local people who are now skilled, effective, experienced members of our team, and who came from that extension of teamwork. This fact is a credit to their own commitment and resilience (*they worked voluntarily while money was found to pay them*), and to the skill and vision of the management committee in acquiring money to pay all of us. The schemes had been tough to operate. Hard decisions had to be made at times. But these positive aspects were also achieved.

Meanwhile, the legal entity of the Youth Action Project had taken much discussion on the committee. This far in its history, 1986, there was a working constitution and YAP was a registered employer. But there was no structure for the protection of members, e.g. in the handling of money or for the protection of the workers, i.e. maintaining some kind of stability. There was still no structure for processing new members on to the committee. The committee looked at co-op structures, and limited company structures. The need for this was becoming critical, especially as strong, founder members of the Project could not serve any longer, because of other commitments. Emer Hanna was to be moved by the probation service and would no longer be in Ballymun, Sr Lena Deevy was leaving the area the following year. Frank Deasy was finding that it was increasingly more difficult to keep regular attendance. Sr Emma Gannon had also gone. She'd moved to Limerick, and then to Scotland to study. We made good use of her, though, when we went to Scotland on a field trip in Oct., '86!!!

Money was still a big issue and no commitment had been received from any government agency. The Youth Affairs grant was repealed in '86, but we didn't know about '87. The money from the schemes had funded participants wages, and some expansion of activities. Small, once-off grants, from other agencies, and fund raising events, kept us afloat, albeit haphazardly. Despite this, courageous decisions were made. For example Declan was sent to America for 3 months in 1986, to experience an adolescent chemical dependency programme there, and to get some training. Catherine applied for the Addiction Studies Course in Trinity College, was short listed

for interview, and got on to a waiting list. This was quite an achievement, as competition was tough for the 12 or so places on the course. Had she been accepted, the Project had made a commitment to assist with the financial cost of doing the course. I was sent to a conference in Cambridge on Community Alcohol Teams.

All these issues of management and funding were rumbling around, and daily the work was going on - counselling, family visits, educational programmes, alternative activities, co-ordinating meetings etc., etc. The need for solid structures, and business skills, was acute! Members of the committee had to be allowed to leave, without fear and guilt, knowing that the Project would continue. So also with the staff. The ever-present danger of falling into the trap of becoming a professional service, and neglecting the integrated community concept, sometimes seemed like the only way to ensure that individuals who came to us received sound professional help, consistently. This is still the danger. YAP provides a service, yes - because no other exists in our community for our people. Therefore this is a need. BUT ownership of the work and the development, must always remain rooted in the community, close enough to the ground for decisions to be relevant, and people to play their part, whatever that might be. This is what makes it different and effective.

So, early in '87 the struggle began to involve yet more new people and find a structure for continuity. An invited group of people, again a mixture, of professionals and residents, met in Sr Lena's basement in Shangan Road. They were presented with the story of the Project to date, the philosophy, and the present difficulties. These people were selected because of their interest in the community, in addition and/or their day to day involvement in our work, or their involvement in a related area (*e.g. youth work*). Twenty five people attended, including staff and committee members. The purpose of this meeting was to create a pool of members, to form a company limited by guarantee, from which committee members could be elected at an A.G.M., which could be added to from time to time. A second meeting was held in May '87, and it was suggested that a committee of 12 be elected made up of locals, non residents who would have an interest through their work, and provision was made for 2 staff places including the co-ordinator. Three spaces were left for people with legal, medical and financial experience, and a new committee of 9 people was agreed upon. The final make up of the new group was:-

4 local residents

3 staff (*2 of whom were local residents*)

1 professional from St Michael's Assessment Centre in Finglas

1 ex staff member, senior house parent in a boy's hostel

Therefore in all, we had 6 local residents, and 3 non residents. Prior to the election, a discussion took place about the role of the management committee, and its relationship to staff. This relationship was described as a partnership, with the 28

committee providing support, accountability and policy making. The skills being looked for included a good knowledge of the development of the Project and Ballymun, the ability to work as a team, negotiating stalls and public relation skills, a mix of ages and experience, an understanding of addiction, good community concept, business, financial, medical and legal skills. The responsibilities of being an employer were also pointed out and discussed. Therefore this new committee, which included three members of the old committee, started work with a tall order” It was an exciting time, but also a frightening one.

The old members held us up while we lumbered along. Now we were being asked to carry on without them. The immediate reaction of the new group was to look to the co-ordinator for security and leadership. Again, it would have been so easy to forge ahead with the work (*which has gained huge momentum, and will be described later*) and leave the committee trailing behind, and use them as “*token*” decision makers!! Operating a community development style management can sometimes be slow and frustrating, especially when the day to day work is so critical and intense. It has been tempting to fall back on the traditional style, pyramid, management where the hierarchy makes decisions and everybody does what they are told!

Both the staff and committee have worked hard to prevent this from happening. From a staff point of view, this model means taking responsibility for the whole response not just your own work. As one of the staff members described it recently “*you ‘re not just doing the job - you’re also creating it*”. Exactly” That is the beauty of it - and the frustration. It means roles cross over, that appointing blame does not solve problems, that issues which effect our effectiveness as a team have to be challenged, and you need all your energy for the intensive individual, group and family work you are involved in!!!!

From a committee point of view, this means retaining the ability to listen to the staff to be concerned for their welfare, to be able to be objective about issues sometimes and to carefully consider all sides before decisions are made. It also means that problems raised by staff, and those who attend the Project, have to be responded to and not ignored. Accountability and policy making responsibilities finally lie with the management committee.

The first task of this new group was to get us registered as a company limited by guarantee. This meant drawing up articles of association which would replace the original constitution. These articles would be our guidelines. The project was registered as a company limited by guarantee in January ‘88, and continues to operate as such.

## CHAPTER 5

### *THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE*

When this new committee took over, by far the biggest problem was finance. 1987 was a tough one! Money was very slow to come in, with no consistency. We had won from the Dept. of Labour, an extension of our Teamwork scheme, for 3 months. When that was over, we had no money to pay wages for those participants. This meant that, for most of the second half of '87, people were back on the dole, continuing their work voluntary. Late in '86, we had been allocated £10,000 from the department of social welfare "*Miscellaneous Grants section*", to help us to put a minibus on the road, for our outside activities. When we applied for this funding, early in '86, it was with the attention of doing exactly that, and everyone was excited at the idea of us having our own transport. However, by the time the cheque came through, our bank accounts were almost empty. Needs can change very quickly in a community group, and long term planning can be a bit of a luxury which few groups can afford. However, attempts are made to plan and develop, like that time when we applied for the grant from Social Welfare.

Anyway, realising that there was no way we could buy a minibus and stay open, contact was made with the Department and local representatives to ask could the money be used to keep us running, until the situation improved. Our understanding was that such permission had been given - but we didn't get that in writing. This meant that we ran into difficulty in the following two years, when we submitted accounts and receipts for expenditure other than a minibus! Once again, valuable time and energy was taken up communicating with department officials about the change. It must be said here that this incident is not reported to criticise any particular department, but to highlight the problems for community groups when they come up against the bureaucracy surrounding funding. A year is a long time in the life of a group which is struggling, as we were then, to survive month by month, and when people are not on proper salaries or contracts. Sometimes planned for developments cannot take place. This in no way implies inefficiency or in competency on the part of the group, but rather reflects the insecure nature of funding for community work. The relationship between funders and groups is not at all helped by rigidity and intransigence. Groups need to have enough control to make the best possible use of whatever funds are available, and to respond quickly to changes as they occur. This need not threaten accountability, or monitoring of any work carried out. As it was we were very glad of that £10,000 throughout 1987 - without it, it is possible that our development would have been greatly impeded, possibly stopped altogether! Eventually, we did manage to resolve the issue with the department. And this department has assisted us since, through a small grant for women's groups.

Meanwhile, the work of meeting our aims was still going on, and the need for us to

become as effective as possible became even more urgent, as that year saw an increase in drug pushing locally, with an influx of people from outside our own area.

There were many demands on us to meet groups, such as tenant associations, youth groups, schools, etc., as the community struggled to cope with the rise in anger and fear. Once again, the committee and staff were forced, as in earlier years to reflect carefully on how to respond to this development. As before, decisions were made based on the focus of our aims and the needs of those involved.

As our services got stronger, we identified work which needed to be done. It seems the more staff we have, and skills, the more work there is to do! One of the issues which confronted us throughout the 80's and still does, was AIDS. Issues like this, with homelessness, physical abuse, prostitution, etc., became part and parcel of our weekly work. Sometimes the lack of help for people caught up in these dangerous situations weighed heavily on us, and our responses needed very careful consideration. Time and time again we had to accept our own powerlessness in situations, our own inadequacy in the face of life threatening situations for our young people. Staying in touch with our powerlessness became even more vital, as we realised that attempts to be all things to all men, quickly led us in to chaotic responses, which could in turn lead to exhaustion, a sense of hopelessness, and bad working relationships. In fact, we saw at times that our organisation could become very much like the family coping with active addiction, through trial and error techniques, anger, frustration, etc. etc. It could become very dysfunctional through trying to solve all the problems. We developed this thinking further, applied it to the community, and it is described later in this account, in chapter 7.

To learn how to deal with our powerlessness and the negative responses it could invoke, we leaned more and more on the recovery programmes by addicts and families, which we knew most about. We are very grateful, particularly to the twelve step programmes, for giving us hope for our powerlessness, and a way to find new, restored power. We struggled to find ways to respond, which didn't have us banging our heads against brick walls, yet didn't have us giving up at the same time. We do not say "*O.K., there's nothing you can do to change this, we're powerless - so let's do nothing!*" Very often, we discovered that it wasn't other people we needed to change, but ourselves. Everyone in YAP from the beginning, has worked hard to keep it true to its original ideals. This meant taking risks, and it meant trusting the process. At times, when things were very black, trust was all that was left, with a belief that it would go forward. Looking back, 1987 was one of those years. We had very little money, a new committee, a young staff, Declan Reddy our first full time worker left, and there was an increase in drug pushing in the area. How did we survive? Who knows? We did what we could, as well as we could, and let go of the rest!

An EC grant in '87, and a small £5,000 grant from the Department of health in

January '88. helped to ease the financial strain slightly. Now we were able to have three staff on wages - our co-ordinator (*now full time*) and two of those who had been on teamwork. Catherine Kelly and Jimmy Judge. Soon after that, we were able to put our secretary Anne Mane Stafford, on wages also, so we had four full paid staff members, three of whom were from Ballymun!

In 1988, we received a surprise donation of £1,000, from a group Jimmy had been involved in. The group had disbanded, and considered that our work was close to the work for which the money had been raised. Contributions like this played a major role in our development.

Our security improved slightly, and we were in the happy position of being able to arrange for both Catherine and Jimmy to go to Minneapolis for 3 months, to further their training in an Adolescent Chemical Dependency Programme. Declan had also gone to Minneapolis, in 1986. Catherine and Jimmy undertook to raise some money to help with the cost of the trip, and we are grateful to all those who contributed. It was particularly heartening that the comprehensive school, where Catherine had been a pupil, organised a quiz for her training, and raised £600! Such support gave us great<sup>r</sup> encouragement. The ability to make decisions like this, which lead to great benefits in the long term, even though the immediate situations were difficult, has, I believe, made for high quality work, and a feeling of being valued by all those who are employees of YAP.

Meanwhile, the national lottery had been launched in Ireland, which brought in much more money than anyone expected. Everyone was applying to the lottery for funding, and YAP was no exception! In May, 1988, we were notified by phone that our application was successful, and the relief was enormous. However, once again the money took a long time to find its way into our account! Yet again, we ran into difficulties in how this grant was to be administered. In the autumn of that year, 1988, two representatives from Comhairle Le Leas Oige called to leave a contract for our consideration. This document was found to be unacceptable by the management committee, as it required that important functions, such as the appointment of staff, had to be approved by Comhairle Le Leas Oige. A revised document was submitted by us to Comhairle in November 1988.

The areas of conflict were discussed in a meeting between two senior members of the Comhairle staff, and the management committee. We were asked to make suggestions for monitoring which could make it possible for us to sign the contract, and also for Comhairle to fulfil its obligations. There was no discussion about our suggested contract, but we did, however, make the suggestions as requested, which we felt would allow the Youth Action Project to go on functioning as a Community body, making it accountable for monies received, and open to independent evaluation. However, our suggestions, even though requested, were never discussed, and once



again we were asked to sign a contract which took power & control away from (he community, and was contrary to community development, and recovery, principles. To resolve this difficulty, we started to lobby Mr. Frank Fahey, the minister responsible for youth affairs, to get involved and clarify the matter. He was very reluctant to do so, and referred us back to Comhairle. We met a deputation from Comhairle, this time from their committee. At that meeting, in Morehampton Road, the issues were discussed in detail, and compromises were suggested.

At the close of the meeting, our management representatives believed that agreement had been reached, and the Comhairle representatives took the suggestions back to their full committee. Therefore, we were very disappointed when we were informed that *“the Comhairle committee decided that it is not prepared to change the terms of the contract”*

It must be emphasised here that at no time did the YAP committee deny the important statutory obligations of Comhairle Le Leas Oige. But our efforts to change a contract which was written in an authoritative, controlling manner, and which negated our basic principles, into one which reflected a relationship of co-operation and mutual respect, proved fruitless. Once again, we pressurised the Minister’s office, who finally agreed to meet us, and Comhairle. However this proved fruitless, and we were left with the impression that we were making a big fuss, that the contract would not change the reality of how we operated, and that there would be no interference. The issue of the possibility of a contract which reflected a relationship of co-operation, as was constantly being stressed by the minister and Comhairle, was not discussed. It was their contract or nothing.

Eventually, when the bank refused to honour our wages cheque, we were forced to sign this contract which we believe to be against our philosophy. This was over a year after the money was allocated to us. Never at any time did we have an adequate explanation about the difficulties on Comhairle’s end. We made it clear on signing the contract that we would continue to struggle to have such contracts changed to reflect a relationship of co-operation not control and confrontation.

Relating this here is a part of that process of struggling to improve conditions of funding. We are not the only group who have had such difficulties, and a situation where groups have to sign documents to pleaseinders, then try and manipulate to do the work they were actually set up to do, is a reflection of dysfunctional relationships, the very things which every day we challenge in those who seek our help. Scarce resources cannot be used to full capacity, nor potential realised, within such relationships. This is why we must struggle to make them better.

However, receipt of the lottery grant has meant that we are more secure than before, although we can still only plan for one year. At the time of writing this account,

January 1991, we still have had no confirmation of how much we will be allocated for this year. So money is still a problem, and we look forward to the day when we can say we have X amount for five years, and put all our energies into the work of meeting our aims more effectively.

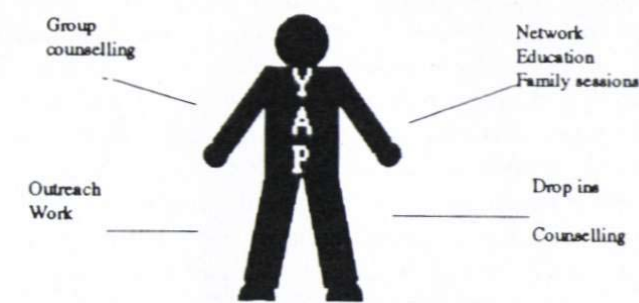
Last year, 1990, we finally received assistance from the Department of Justice, in the form of a £15.000 allocation. Again it is stressed that this was not guaranteed for future years.

Ideally, we do not see only one department having responsibility for helping us financially. The Department of Health, Education and Justice, all have a role to play. With the allocation from the Department of Justice, all those have made some contribution to our development, but this needs to be improved. Hopefully, we can all work on this together in the next ten years!

So the years from 1987 onwards have seen some stability for staff established, and we still have our co-ordinator, and the three Ballymuners from the team-work days! We also have three other staff members now, one of whom is also from Ballymun. This continues our philosophy of community development, which uses resources from within the community, and where necessary from outside the community. Our young staff have been widely recognised as being skilled in their work, and our premises have retained the friendly, informal atmosphere, throughout the years of establishing enough structures and formality to ensure professional work was being done. YAP has established itself as an authority in this field of young people, drug abuse, and the community. It is ten years old now, and that fact has led to a lot of reflection, and evaluation. We've been spending time looking at the different parts of our project, and now they relate to one another. For instance, the relationship between a staff of seven full time members and the management committee, is obviously different from the staff/committee relationship when there were only two staff, and a committee of many founder members. Time out has to be taken to ensure that we don't fall into the traps of becoming a service in the community instead of a community response. Any agency can provide a service, but developing a community response is different. So, a big part of our operation for 1990, and now early in 91, has been to take stock of what's been happening, our achievements, and areas we need to improve. As I said somewhere earlier on, there's no arriving????????.

## CHAPTER 6

### *THE WORK WE DO*



Our founder members spent a lot of valuable time and energy laying down the aims of the Youth Action Project. What they finally agreed on has continued. Our day -today work and our decisions about directions and policies, are taken with the aims in mind. This chapter will describe briefly the work that is undertaken to try to meet each of the aims, realising that this is an on going process, that much of the work overlaps, and that much of it is nearly impossible to describe!

#### 1. TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DRUG ABUSE.

Probably one of our most difficult aims to pin down, it is significant that it *is* named first. This aim is to develop, conveying an understanding of process, time and building. It is our major belief that the community is crucial in any effective response to drug abuse. The struggles which have been describe here, particularly around funding, are part of the work carried out in remaining true to this aim. So also is the policy of training and employing local people, and struggling to involve even more local people in the running of the project. Our management committee has a majority of Ballymun residents, and in our staff of seven, four are from Ballymun. For our 10th birthday celebration a mixed group from the committee staff, those who use our services, and one or two other interested people, got together to plan how to mark this occasion. All of that sub committee, except one, are from the Ballymun area. And the way the celebrations were planned, particularly in the format of the structure of the weekend conference in March, reflects the philosophy of a community response. It was planned as a weekend for the people, time when everyone can reflect on what was begun ten years ago, take part in taking an inventory of that, and planning directions for the future. No one needed a formal label for this conference - there were no experts! A few celebrities, but no experts! Everyones point of view was relevant. It was a mixture of celebration, reflection, education and planning for the future.

The future has to be one where there will be more and more involvement in key areas by the community in Ballymun. Regularly, local people have attended seminars and conferences, often being the only parents, or “*NON-Professionals*” at the events.

This will continue, as will our policy of recruiting and training local young people

who have shown that it isn't necessary to have a college degree to be effective and professional at work. Discipline, training and commitment are necessary, but we will continue to show that there are more ways of becoming professional, than through 3rd level education. Of course, it is a source of satisfaction that, through working and learning in the project, staff are interested in their continuing education, and they will be encouraged and supported as much as possible to undertake further education of their own choice. In a community with a low level of participation in 3rd level education, that is indeed an achievement, and a crucial part of developing a community response. Through becoming more and more educated, learning and refining skills, Ballymun people can reclaim some of the power that has been given to the "experts", to cure their ills.

Of course, our statutory agencies and their staff are also a big part of the community in Ballymun. They spend a lot of time there, carrying out their work. And we have been privileged to work with many fine people in our first ten years. They have given encouragement, shared their skills, and their access to resources. We regularly have meetings with these agents, some weekly and some monthly. The weekly one is with those who are directly involved in the drugs issue, e.g. the EHB addiction counsellor, the AIDS outreach workers, etc. The relationship enjoyed with these workers is very valuable to us, and contributes to a sense of totality in the response on the ground. We meet monthly with other agents, to network information and share ideas around the drugs issue. This meeting is one of our longest standing, beginning in early 1985. Many agents have come and gone from the meetings, yet still each month a group of interested, sometimes anxious, people arrive for the network.

In latter years, we have also developed a policy of involving other agents in our community education programmes, as partners. This is to combat the idea of creating too much "Specialisation", and also to help build confidence in our teachers, youth workers etc. for dealing with drug and alcohol related issues. It is in line with current research, which tells us that many people with drug and alcohol related problems present to general community agencies, but the workers involved do not feel confident in helping them with their problems. In this area, too we have run an addiction studies course, in which 15 local agents participated, and was found to be very helpful to them.

Underlying all of our work to meet this, our first aim, is a process of on going reflection and de-coding of the reality. In this process, the Youth Action Project seeks to contribute to the transformation of that reality, to work with all other people in responding effectively to the elements and systems which make our community powerless, and keep it powerless. Sometimes through being involved in this kind of process, we see that all we can do is change ourselves, reflect on our defects. And we come to see, then, that we learn and gain as much as any of those who use our services. This concept is very different from a "*Generous response to people in need*".

Through this we all gain personally and become participants in the process of lasting change, because it is in our own interests to do so.

## 2. TO PROVIDE AN INFORMATION/ADVICE/SUPPORT SERVICE FOR PEOPLE CAUGHT IN THE CYCLE OF DRUG ABUSE, AND THEIR FAMILIES.

This was an identified need early on in the history of the Youth Action Project. There was no where locally where people could get information on drugs, abuse, or where to get help. Our drug addicts weren't using the services available in town and elsewhere in the city, until they were injecting drugs daily, and suffering severe consequences. Families were isolated and frightened, not understanding what was happening, and not knowing where to go for help.

Therefore the first thing that happened when the early committee was allocated 1A Balcurris road by Dublin Corporation, was to open every Monday Night voluntarily, to provide this information. Even at that early stage, with no consistent daily service, the place was used by a few people, both addicts and family members, and some who made contact even then, as young teenagers, are still in contact today. It was through this service, that Narcotics Anonymous came to Ballymun, meeting in 1A. (Locally the Project is often referred to as "1A", or the "1A club"!! This is from the early days, when it was the only place we had.)

We still open every Monday night, when our phones and office are manned for anyone who is seeking information. We also have two groups of young people in recovery, meeting on that night. And of course, our information service is expanded to include every day, Monday - Friday, from 10a.m. - 5p.m.

Our support service has also greatly expanded, and now includes individual counselling, group work, alternative activities, and family work. As well as working inside the premises, our staff also visit institutions where young people might be for a period, and the homes of the families we come into contact with. We regularly go away for weekends with small groups, and this will be expanded soon when, with the help of the Irish Youth Foundation (who have given us welcome financial support in the provision of equipment, etc) we hope to acquire a holiday home, to be used for small groups and families throughout the year.

Our outreach worker keeps contact with those who are in prison, residential schools, etc., and works with young people who don't attend the project, through community workshops, etc. In 1990 a big step was taken in this work when Brian Foley (*Our outreach worker, and a resident of Ballymun*) went to London for a week to make contact with agencies there. We are concerned about our young people who go to

London, and who may encounter severe difficulties there. Also it is an admission of the reality of HIV and AIDS, and the fact that many young Irish people are going to London for help.

We have become aware of the many gaps in the service for young people who are effected by drug abuse. We have provided what we consider to be essential services, within our capabilities. On those outside our resources, e.g. a residential treatment programme for young people hooked on drugs/alcohol, we have lobbied the government to look at the needs and plug the gaps. However, so far we still have no such treatment facility, and there are still huge gaps in the services to all drug users

As for our own services, we have been careful not to duplicate existing resources, and have tried not to set up services, except when they were particularly needed, not already available, and within our expertise.

### 3. TO DEVELOP PREVENTATIVE SERVICES, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OR VULNERABLE TO DRUG ABUSE.

Some of the work involved in meeting this aim overlaps with that described in the aim no.2. We come into contact with many young people, mostly aged 16 and under, who are highly at risk of developing serious drug and alcohol related problems. Some of these young people are either experimenting with solvents, alcohol, hash, tranquilliser tablets, or regularly using these substances, and others are living in situations where someone else's drug/alcohol abuse is causing severe problems for all the family. We involve them in one-to-one relationships with our staff, groups where possible, and engaged them in alternative activities. We have actually targeted those children who are living with severe alcohol/drug related problems at home, as a group who are highly at risk of developing problems themselves.

For many of these young people at risk there are other pressing issues which are closely related to harmful drug/alcohol use. For instance, we have been concerned, along with other agencies in the community, about our young people who either drop out, or are expelled, from our education system early, sometimes as young as twelve years of age. We have lobbied, again with other concerned agencies like the local schools, social workers, for an alternative education programme to be made available in Ballymun for these children. So far our efforts have achieved nothing, and a sizeable minority of our children are not attending any school, and are floating around, vulnerable to all that might be around them. There is ultimate responsibility on the Minister for Education to address this issue, and ensure that all children have access to education which meets their needs, and developes their potential. We consider that the lack of this facility, in the face of very definite evidence being presented to the department of education, is a serious crime committed against vulnerable children.

Another such issue is that of youth homelessness. If young people are on the streets, facing the difficulties of getting food and shelter, and vulnerable to exploitation because of desperation, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them not to get into regular heavy drinking/drug use.

At least if they're drunk they won't feel much of the pain or the fear! We welcome the opening, in Ballymun of a local facility for our homeless young girls, but urge that one facility is not the only answer. There needs to be on going work carried out, to respond to this problem on many fronts.

In our preventative work with young people at risk, we have come to see that the quality of the relationships surrounding them has a major part to play in whether or not they go on to develop major drug/alcohol related problems. We have endeavoured to facilitate the growth of open, constructive relationships between these young people and those who come into contact with them. To this end, we regularly bring people together who are involved with young people, around particular issues we see affecting them. Over the last couple of months, our staff have been involved with a group of workers who want to improve the relationship between young people, and the local Gardai. It is hoped through a process of dialogue, to facilitate a better understanding of both sides, for the benefit of both the young people, and the Gardai.

Working with young people at risk is demanding, often frustrating. We try to meet them openly, and with respect, providing them with a climate within which they can change and grow. Ensuring that the climate has the right conditions for the growth is our responsibility, using it to change lifestyles is up to the young people themselves.

We cannot create all the conditions necessary on our own. We need the involvement of the wider community, and the institutions of the state, to co-operate with us in building a safer environment in which young people can heal themselves, and grow.

#### 4. TO ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION ON DRUG ABUSE.

Since the beginning this has been an important task of all involved in the project. We have adopted a policy of, where possible, undertaking programmes in the community, in preference to once off talks. At the beginning of 1990, we had developed this to a stage where we had an eight week programme going on in the Holy Spirit National School, a similar one going on with a youth group in the Virgin Mary Parish, a 40 hour addiction studies course for local workers, and other smaller programmes for groups with particular requests. In this school year, all our national schools will have our programmes for 6th classes, and all the class teachers will be involved in the programme with us.

We are regularly asked to work with groups outside our community, and where possible we meet these requests. We believe that part of our role is to help other communities to develop their responses, by sharing our experiences with them. We hope that the 1990's will see community responses growing in all areas of Dublin, and the rest of the country. Where we can help, we will.

#### 5. TO WORK CLOSELY WITH OTHER VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY GROUPS PROVIDING COMMUNITY SERVICES.

Much of the work done in meeting this aim has already been outlined. Suffice it to say here that drug abuse is a very total, all consuming problem, and touches on all other issues and groups within the community. Therefore we have worked to try to keep in touch with other developments, and have supported other initiatives where time and energy permitted. We see all of the groups working for the development of Ballymun, as being part of the recovery from powerlessness of this community, and we hope that in the 1990's we can become stronger through honest service and dialogue.

Outside the Ballymun community we have worked with other drugs/alcohol agencies to provide better services for our young people (e.g. Stanhope Street Alcohol service), and to develop creative ways of addressing the issues which contribute to, or exacerbate, addiction in our community. This is in recognition again, of the totality of the situations facing our communities, that you can't separate the drug issues from the situations in which they grow and flourish.

#### 6. TO FACILITATE RESEARCH INTO DRUG ABUSE IN THE AREA.

Once again, this is the ongoing work of the project. Patterns of abuse, actual drugs being used etc. can change, and through active local involvement and listening, we have identified the various types of drug abuse in our area. This varies, as outlined earlier, from solvents, to alcohol use daily, to mixing alcohol, hash & tranquilizers, tranquilizers alone, and IV drug use. We have kept records of numbers attending each week, and now this is annually in our report. The age range involved in the different patterns goes from as young as 10 to adult.

We have spent time trying to describe the response, and look at the ways the communities can, and do, respond to serious drug/alcohol issues in their midst. This is described in detail in chapter 7 and is presented as a means for everyone trying to identify aspects of our collective functioning which we need to work on, if drug abuse is to be responded to effectively, and prevention made possible for our children.

We have also taken part in the collection of data for the Health Research Board, which is involved in setting up an effective reporting system, with other countries in Europe, to monitor patterns and trends in drug abuse.



## **SUMMARY**

In carrying out our work to meet the aims laid down by the founder members, we have attempted to respond

- A) To the individual
- B) To the Family
- C) To the community.

Naturally, much of this work cannot be categorised, or measured. What actually works for an individual?. When does the switch from negative to positive take place? We don't really know - very often, it's at times when we are not around, and almost always it's when least expected. All we can do is help things to happen, not make them happen. We are still learning, hopefully together, how to make changes which make a difference possible in our community.

## CHAPTER 7

### ***DEVELOPING A WORKABLE COMMUNITY CONCEPT.***

Youth Action Project aim no 1: to develop a community response to drug abuse.

*“Community response”* is a description used by different groups to describe what they are doing to cope with drug abuse in their area. But what does it mean? It can be used in different ways to describe different approaches. Our founders had laid this down as the no 1 aim of the group, and consistently emphasised that the unit of action was the community.

Through our reflection over the years, we came to realise that this unit, the community is a crucial factor in determining whether or not someone remained addicted. We turned current popular thinking, which looked at the factors which may contribute to the onset of addiction, on its head.

It happened like this.

Much of our everyday work is concerned with people who are addicted, to drugs, solvents, drink, gambling, etc., and their families. In our involvement with them, we found that it wasn't helpful to engage in “guess work” about why they were harming themselves and their families through their addictions. Rather, it proved more effective to help them understand their drug/alcohol/gambling dependency as a PRIMARY issue in their lives. We found people could relate to a model of primary dependency, and could begin to make decisions about how to recover from this.

Similarly with families. Whilst many of our families have other problems (what families don't), we found that they could identify how the family system had become part and parcel of the addiction process, the system actually helps it to continue, rather than stopping it, which is the desired intention.

So, we knew something about the individual, and the family. The family is a UNIT. Within the family, alcoholism and drug addiction is both personal and systemic – i.e. it affects each member as an individual, and the family system as a whole.

We began to wonder - the family as a unit - the community as a unit - maybe, just maybe, we could learn something from the family system, which would help us in our work with the community system. We were quite excited - we had the feeling we were on to something.

So, we went back to the beginning.

When alcoholism and/or drug dependency begins to show itself in a person, everyone whose life touches theirs is in one way or another affected by it.

Its direct consequences fall on the members of the immediate family, and the way they adapt to the worsening situation rather than helping, contributes to the condition as it progresses, and becomes part of it.

As the problem worsens, so the behaviour becomes more and more defensive. All actions are attempts to control the situation, to keep the show on the road. It becomes a fight for survival, not growth. Personal development within the family is stifled, as is the development of the family unit. The system goes through certain phases. First of all, it reacts with disbelief. "This can't be happening in OUR family" - strong attempts are made to deny the problem. But it persists! The drinking/using gets worse.

Next, the family members attempt to find "*the reason*" for this, and to eliminate the problem. There are as many "*reasons*" found, as there are people with drug/alcohol related problems. When elimination doesn't work, there follows a period of disorganisation, while family members shift in roles and positions, to accommodate the worsening situation. One or two may leave home, coming and going, someone else may try to keep control of everything including ALL members of the family. This can lead to resentment and worsening relationships. The family will try to find something to blame for this frightening uncontrollable problem in their midst. During this phase, there may well be periods of calm, and the problem may look as though it has stabilised. However, in many cases, these calm periods come between storms and eventually the family may try to achieve separateness from the problem, and go on to live in spite of it.

So, our picture of the family unit begins to look like this:

<b>FAMILY FEELINGS</b>	<b>FAMILY BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>FAMILY PHASES</b>
Failure	controlling	disbelief
fear	avoiding	finding the reason
shame	rigid	attempts to eliminate
guilt	judgemental	attempts to control
hopelessness	confused	blaming
hatred	crisis oriented	separating from the
despair	trial and error	problem
powerlessness	techniques	living in spite of it
low self esteem		

So, through looking at addiction as a primary issue for the family, we can see that it becomes not only a problem IN the family, but also OF the family. It both affects the system, and is affected by the system. We get a very total situation, working for survival, not growth.

Now, we asked ourselves can we look at the community unit in a similar way? Can we see similar things happening? We asked ourselves questions like -

Is there a preoccupation with the addiction problem?

Do people find something to blame?

Has the community tried different ways to resolve them?

Are there similar feelings of shame, guilt, low self esteem, and hopelessness?

Do we say "*It's not my problem*"?

Do we try to live in spite of it?

Using our combined experiences of working, living and growing up in Ballymun, we felt we could list the feelings about the drugs problem:

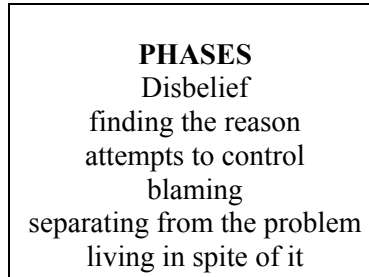
<p><b>COMMUNITY FEELINGS</b></p> <p>Anger shame hatred fear hopelessness guilt despair powerlessness</p>
--

Aren't these VERY similar to family feelings? And what about the reactions of community members to these feelings? Have people behaved in these ways;

<p><b>BEHAVIOURS</b></p> <p>Controlling avoiding rigid judgmental confused crisis oriented trial and error techniques</p>
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Again through the collective knowledge of all involved in the Project, these behaviours were clearly identifiable within our community. They were defined as reactions to a difficult frightening problem for the people.

And what about the phases we have gone through since these problems became apparent in our communities?



There can be no doubt about the period of disbelief, and the denial of the problem. Nationally, this was even more in evidence than locally, when we consider how long it took the government to listen to evidence coming from the ground, and ask for research to be done. Even since then, this mechanism of disbelief and denial is still operating, evidenced by an *“it’s no that bad”* *“it’ll go away”* attitude on the part of decision makers.

Many attempts have been made to find the reason for the problem, and eliminate it. This, too, *has* proved ineffective. So far in our knowledge there is no one reason drug addiction. Nor is there any identifiable collection of factors which influence the onset of addiction. However, we do know that communities like ours are very vulnerable, and are the worst hit when sevens problems escalate, this will be talked about further on in this account.

For now, back to the phases. Attempts to control - yes there have been many of those, mostly through our criminal justice system. We now have new laws and penalties. Many pushers have been locked up. but we still have the problem. We in the Project see this approach as being minimally effective, because it only takes into account a PART of the drug abuse. Remember the analysis of the problem by the early members of YAP? And the realisation that if we had no illegal drugs in the morning we would still have a problem? Well, that we see as being a big reason for the failure of control measures ON THEIR OWN to alienate the problem.

Blaming? Haven’t we seen and heard loads of that? Blame the schools, blame the government, blame the church, etc. And of course the group who probably have the least resources to cope with being blamed - the parents. Apportioning blame is not going to solve the problem. Rather, we ALL need to take responsibility for our part of the system, and encourage responses of care and concern, instead of blame and judgement.

Many members of the community have tried to achieve separateness from the problem. This can be seen by things like people going out of the area to shop, to

school, to socialise, moving away etc., etc. People can physically live in an area, without actually seeming to be part of it

And many have tried to live in spite of the problem. It is not now an item on everyone's tongue. It is taken for granted. People have given up. And not only in our local communities. Drug abuse is no longer an item on the political agenda, or the media agenda. It is no longer "news". But it's still there - it hasn't gone away.

Through this, we believe we have come up with a fairly accurate assessment of the process that has taken place, not only in Ballymun but elsewhere.

Encouraged by our progress, we developed this further. Claudia Black, in her work on families hurt by addiction, describes the mechanisms which develop with the problem as it grows. She talks about new roles developing for all the family members, and new rules for everyone to follow. The rules determine what is, and is not, allowed in the system. Sometimes these may actually be stated, like "*you do not speak about our business outside the house*". Or they may be picked up by people in the family, even though they are not verbalised. One of these might be "*You don't bring friends home without prior warning*". There just might be a terrible fight going on! These rules will be shared by two or more people in the system, even if they are not openly stated. Human beings have a great knack for "*sussing out*" what's o.k. and what's taboo. Most of this is unconscious, and happens automatically, to protect us from difficult and painful realities-the more painful the reality, the more important are the rules for coping with it.

Ms Black describes the three major unspoken family rules as DON'T TALK, DON'T TRUST, and DON'T FEEL. If you don't talk about what's going on, either to other family members, or to people outside the family, then you can pretend it's not there, and then you won't have to do something about it.

If you learn not to trust what people say, or how they behave, then you won't be disappointed or hurt when they let you down, or when your welfare is not important. If you rely on yourself, at least you won't be hurt. You can pretend other people don't matter, that you don't need them. And if you learn not to feel the pain of the situation, the fear, anger, loneliness, etc., etc., then you will be able to carry on with everyday life, as though nothing was wrong. And you can convince yourself, and everyone else, that you're fine.

Within the family, these survival techniques become very important. Something terrible will happen if they are penetrated by reality. The family will crumble. THEY ARE REACTIONS TO POWERLESSNESS AND FEAR. They help people survive the crisis, but they do not foster growth and development. And they become part of the problem allowing it to continue.

We wondered whether these same unspoken rules operated within the bigger unit of the community.

### ***DON'T TALK***

We believe that people don't talk in a constructive way about problems. Often, everyone knows what's happening, but nobody says anything or they "*bitch*" and moan about it. Sometimes, people try to talk and do something, but they get discouraged and give up. Perhaps this is because there is no obvious common way to handle problems, and communication can be indirect and ambiguous. It is also reflected in people not using their vote, and making their voices heard in issues which affect them. People know that things have gone wrong in Ballymun, but too many don't know how to confront structures when they go wrong. And too many don't know what is going on around the community, to try to respond to issues. Often, only those involved in groups have any information. It's not reaching people who are not active in groups. We are constantly amazed by the fact that people still tell us they've never heard of the Youth Action Project, or that they didn't know they could get help there. Yet our members have spoken in almost every part of the community, in churches, public meetings, training courses, schools, etc., etc., etc., and we have put leaflets in through every door in the area.

### ***DON'T TRUST***

Building trust in Ballymun has been a difficult process, because of the transitory nature of some tenants. We believe that this has further been damaged by the drugs problem in the community. People find it easier to close their doors, to rely on themselves and stay out of the way. The community, then, does not act as a unit, but can be split into different parts. Instead of active involvement around the common interests, the danger is that those who get involved become, or are seen as, cliques. Nobody trusts a clique.

Personalities become very important, instead of principles. All communities have their heroes - but what happens when they're not around. Does everything stop?

And institutions also become very important - the church, schools, gardai, etc. They given the power to solve the problems, and can be blamed when nothing changes.

Security has become a big issue. People are frightened in their own area. Proposals go in for increased policing, barriers, doors, etc.

When the “*don’t trust*” mechanism operates, individual progress is knocked down, and the community survives, but does not develop. Outside resources are hard to get, and power becomes more important than service. The community is vulnerable and can be exploited.

### ***DON’T FEEL***

Through pain and fear, many have learned not to feel, to deny that it hurts, and direct the feelings elsewhere. “*Don’t Feel*” operates when you get people being ashamed of where they come from, pretending they’re from somewhere else. The level of community self esteem is low when this rule operates. People become apathetic, and blame whatever they can find, to make them feel better.

So, then, we say that the rules of DON’T TALK. DON’T TRUST and DON’T FEEL, can very easily be described in a community context. The entire community is affected by the addiction problems within it, and in turn affects those self-same problems. (*N.B. when we say addiction problems, we mean ALL of them - drugs, alcohol, gambling.*) Just as in a family the community has become part of the problem, and is part of an increasingly destructive interaction.

We can say with confidence from our experience of family dynamics, that as long as these roles apply, and are used for coping with powerlessness, the situation will not be resolved. The system will remain locked in, in spite of perhaps good recoveries by addicts, and will produce more addicted people. For effective, lasting change, change which makes a difference, these coping mechanisms, in dynamic interaction, must be identified, and changed. The position taken by Stanton, Todd and Associates in “*The Family Therapy of Drug Abuse and Addiction*” (1982) is that whatever the variables affecting onset, the family is a crucial factor in determining whether someone REMAINS addicted.

This is not, just an individual and family problem. It is a community problem. THE COMMUNITY IS PART OF THE ADDICTION PROCESS. THE COMMUNITY IS A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT SOMEONE REMAINS ADDICTED.



## CHAPTER 8

### ***COMMUNITY RECOVERY***

This analysis brings community work and addiction together for us. It unites all the aspects of our work, helping us to make decisions about priorities, budgeting etc. Instead of lots of separate little “cells” in the community it brings things into focus, giving us a way to see the community as a whole unit, which relates to drug abuse.

This model gives us a framework for reflecting on the reality in which we find ourselves. It provides very definite areas to work on and develop. It is concerned, not just with social order or acceptability, or practical issues, but with changing the very structures by which we live and control our lives.

It begins with powerlessness - something we don’t like to admit. Does it have to be negative? Does it really mean, as is commonly believed, that we can do nothing, that we have to sit back and let things get worse? We in the Youth Action Project don’t believe that we believe that our common powerlessness unites us in our struggle to find effective ways forward. What do addicts tell us - those who lost all power and control to drugs and drink? Alcoholics Anonymous call powerlessness “*the bedrock of recovery*”. Al Anon, a programme for family recovery, says: “*Invariably, they find of only defects of character that they first imagined but assets as well*”.

They tell us “*you can turn negative into positives*.” They also tell us there are no magic answers, no quick cures.

Through our sense of powerlessness, we can come together, and can arrive, like the individual and family to a new, restored power, not one of power-over, but power together. This sense of power is built on our weaknesses and limitations, and admits our inadequacies and lack of answers. This new power is collective, not individual. It means that addiction specialists, doctors, teachers, clergy, social workers, nurses, community activists, residents, etc., etc., are all the same. When faced with addiction, we are all in the same boat. This is what unites us. Through focussing on our limitations we can come to a new, restored power, which becomes evident when we are honest enough to stop playing games, and share common goals, working for these and not personal “*power-over*”. We have to be concerned with HOW we do things, rather than WHAT or WHY. This approach is a creative, searching fearless way to go forward.

Changing to a process of COMMUNITY RECOVERY would seem to have these essential steps:

1. admit our personal limitations;
2. be open to believing that a way forward can be found and that change will happen;
3. find strength in coming together and trust that strength;
4. take an honest inventory of the community and share it with others;
5. work together to change the things we can change;
6. continue to reflect and take inventory;
7. correct mistakes as they occur;
8. continue to trust the collective strength.

It is with confidence that we say that taking these steps provides the means for promoting an effective community response to drug abuse.

It is through experience that we say that staying in touch with the basis of these steps, has made it possible for the Youth Action Project to stay creative and use all its resources. Through using this approach, we have all become learners together. We keep ourselves open to change.

Any actions taken through this approach is action of responsibility, not mere expediency. Sometimes this can be very difficult, when the pressures and every day problems of a busy organisation cry out for prompt attention. Then we need to remind one another that HOW our action is done is as important, if not more so, than WHAT is done. The principals we have learned about recovery remind us how to promote techniques for living not just survival.

We remind ourselves often that;

1. leaders are trusted servants
2. leaders have more responsibility not power
3. groups share a common bond, but are autonomous
4. recovery depends on common well being
5. recovery comes first
6. recovery is about principles, not personalities
7. power is at the periphery, not the centre.

## ***BALLMUN IN RECOVERY***

When we say that the community is crucial factor in determining whether or not people who are addicted remain addicted, we bring everyone in to the recovery process. The whole system is named as being in need of a change, and in need of finding new ways to operate. It is not merely a matter of changing WHAT is done, but HOW it is done. The whole community accepts the responsibility and need for a changed reality. The blaming stops, and constructive dialogue begins. Real listening is evident. Honest sharing, struggling for a better system grows.

That Ballymun is a community in recovery can be in DO doubt. Throughout the country, the work going on here by local people is recognised as being amongst the most advanced, and of high standard. Throughout the 80s, we have seen the growth of Tennants Associations, who have been instrumental in working with Corporation for improved maintenance on the estate. Ballymun Coalition came into being, and the Ballymun Task Force. The Task Force has a combined membership of local representations and statutory agencies, and succeed in drawing up major plans for the refurbishment of the estate on which work had already begun. Very valuable work was carried out by the SUSS centre, which was established by local people to provide information, practical help, and research in the area. Unfortunately this group no longer exists, but the work done has provided us with very important information. A local job centre was established, the first of its kind in Ireland. It is made up of a co-op of local residents and organises its work to meet the needs of the people rather than those of larger bureaucracies. A Credit Union has been established to provide affordable loans for people.

A womens refuge centre has been set up, and a response to single people living alone, Linx, has done valuable work in helping new tenants make contacts in the estate. Ballymun has its own Community and Family Training Agency, which runs self development courses and community leadership courses". This agency has also been contracted to undertake courses in other parts of Dublin, and has a philosophy of training residents to themselves become trainers.

However, that impact will remain limited unless the wider system also takes responsibility and becomes involved in the process of change. That is why we go on challenging authoritarian, controlling mechanisms which leads us into a survival situation. BALLYMUN WANTS GROWTH NOT SURVIVAL. It challenges structures which make promises, but don't keep them ; structures which treat it important only at election time structures which hand down decisions made by people who don't have to live with the consequences of those decisions; structures which try to change the nature of our community responses to suit bureaucrats needs and not the needs of the people, etc., etc. Ballymun is holding its head up and asserting its right to have a say in its future. It has begun to change the rules of DON'T TALK, DON'T

TRUST, DON'T FEEL.

There are many obstacles. Some are within and some are external. Care needs to be exercised. Our own groups could become like the bigger systems. They could become controlling, rigid little power houses for a few people. We need to be alert to continue to take inventory and assess HOW we do things. We need to remember that decisions are made by putting RECOVERY first not last. We will carry on, hopefully being responsible not expedient. In that way, THE COMMUNITY WILL BECOME PART OF THE RECOVERY PROCESS, IT WILL BE A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN MAKING POSSIBLE MANY MORE INDIVIDUALS RECOVERIES. IT WILL FOSTER STRUCTURES FOR GROWTH, NOT MERE SURVIVAL. AND IT WILL ULTIMATELY HAVE EFFECTIVE PREVENTION.

## CHAPTER 9

### ***BLOCKS TO DEVELOPMENT***

The concept outlined here is one which, we believe, can unite everybody, despite differences of opinion and lifestyle, by providing a framework for reflection and identification of reality. It is for each person, each group, to use this framework, take the risks of identifying what in their functioning has become part of an addiction cycle, and work to change them.

In arriving at this concept of community recovery, and attempting to make it work, we again become painfully aware of the limitations of many of our structures in facilitating growth and development. For instance, the issues facing some of our young people receive scant attention from our decisions makers. Youth homelessness is an issue which has been tirelessly raised by agencies throughout the city, for many years now. Yet we are still in positions of not being able to find safe places for many. We find that decisions are made out of expediency, not true care for the needs of the children. Similarly with the school system. At least seven years ago, Ballymun was identified as having a significant number of young people dropping out of school early, and not attending any place of learning. For the past 3 years a group made up of head teachers, teachers, social workers, community groups has been working to establish a structure within the community for young people whose needs are not *met* within the existing school system. So far, the need has been acknowledged by the Department of Education, but no action has been taken. In the meantime, more young people reach the employment market without basic education.

Yet another issue is that of the lack of appropriate treatment for young people with severe alcohol/drug related problems. These young people usually work their way through all the agencies, until they are old enough to be locked up for what we would call drug and alcohol related offences.

These issues have been repeatedly highlighted, yet nothing happens. It is our contention that this is so not because of a lack of money, as is the most commonly used excuse, but because of a lack of care and responsibility. Expedient, not responsible mechanisms operate and keep our young people in life threatening situations. Some have died.

Also of concern to our community is the “Stark unrelieved poverty” which underlies “the serious local and economic crisis facing the community” (Ballymun Task Force). Poverty is closely interlinked with all aspects of the drug related issues in our community, affecting prevention, active addiction, and recovery.

Taking recovery first, we see it as obvious that the struggle involved in obtaining

employment makes it very hard for a recovering person and family in our community to have a dignified quality of life, which can promote the change and development necessary for a full recovery. It is harder to hang on to hope, when life might possibly be a succession of failure at interviews, short term government schemes, living by your wits to make ends meet, than it is if you can work towards the employment of your choice, have some money in your pocket to take part in other leisure activities, go on holidays, perhaps go to college, etc., etc.

Yet many people are hanging on to that hope. They can teach us about change, about priorities, about choices. But on their own they cannot change the structures which have made widespread poverty exist, and institutionalised it. Poverty must be addressed as part of a recovery process. If we are truly interested in change that will lead to prevention, then it has to be deep, on-going, and lasting.

Young people who grow up in an atmosphere of poverty, begin their venture into life already disadvantaged, already feeling powerless to change anything, already wondering is there any hope. The use of drugs/alcohol/solvents/gambling does create a short lived, immediate excitement in their lives. Living in poverty means living for the day that's in it - its almost impossible to plan for a future.

People living with poverty experience a high level of stress. This has most recently been highlighted by the Economic and Social Research Institute in their report "Unemployment, Poverty and Psychological Distress." In their concluding paragraph, the authors state clearly that the issues involved in the levels of psychological distress found are national rather than local. In a sentence which must sum up the situation for all concerned, they say that to increase self-esteem and feelings of mastery and improve mental health, people need to have jobs and be removed from poverty.

The temptation to use chemicals to relieve stress, to escape from overpowering problems and to relax for a little while is very strong in an environment which does not provide basic necessities for living. There is an absence of other affordable, accessible ways to relax. Ballymun, for instance, has no leisure centre. Its shopping centre has been grossly neglected and provides no pleasure in shopping there. Services considered essential to other communities are being reduced in Ballymun. A prime example is the banking service. Bank of Ireland pulled out completely, leaving AIB as the only bank in the area. Then AIB changed the status of the Ballymun branch from a full office, to a sub office of the Finglas branch. This meant that some banking transactions could only be carried out in Finglas. Then a decision was taken to close this sub office two days a week, leaving Ballymun with a form of banking service for 3 days of the week only. One of the reasons given for this decision was that an ATM machine had been installed. The Ballymuners were quick to point out that elsewhere those machines are an added service, but in Ballymun they replace the service!

At the time of writing this account there is serious local concern about the department of Education's proposal to close the senior comprehensive school in Ballymun. It is common knowledge that educational standards are directly related to employment prospects. Yet, in this area of very high unemployment, the Department of Education propose to reduce the educational facilities, when they should in fact be developing them.

These decisions are taken from standpoints of expediency, not of the vulnerability of this community to drugs/alcohol. They treat this community as less important than balancing the books, and having things nice and tidy for the bureaucrats. They will play their part in the addition of the future, by decreasing the esteem of this community and leaving the people open to exploitation.

In between prevention and recovery, we have active addiction. Poverty plays a part here, too. Active addiction can push a family into poverty, when they may otherwise have had the capacity to keep above the line. It can increase existing poverty, contributing to rent arrears, unpaid bills, bad nutrition, etc. The level of active addiction in any area strains the services, which are already limited. These services cannot intervene at earlier stages, before too much damage is done, because the severe problems take up the energy, and crisis situations have to be responded to.

Active addiction can also be a way of having an identity, and getting some attention. It is a way of having some power and control. Those who surround the addicts are wrapped in survival techniques, with limited choices so enabling tends to go on longer. There are many ready excuses here for those who have severe problems. People tolerate, as throughout the country, a high level of drunkenness, because life is such a struggle. People are vulnerable to prescribed medication, and once dependent on these, find it very difficult to get off them.

Chemical use becomes a way of life for some families. Children don't know any other way. Heavy drinking is accepted, and young people follow that. Drug and alcohol related problems are not identified as such, and help is more difficult to get in an area with no money for private treatment. There are waiting lists for medical cards holders in all areas of health care, and this is no different.

Sometimes the active addiction seems too big to be tackled, too ingrained. People already have many problems and energies are taken up with them. But active addiction pulls us further down the slippery slope, and we need effective, affordable, accessible ways of treating all kinds of drug and alcohol related problems if there is to be any improvement in the life of the community.

In summary, the we see poverty as being a crucial issue, in these ways:

PREVENTION	ACTIVE ADDICTION	RECOVERY
High level of stress; temptation to use chemicals to escape; temptation to get involved in trafficking; temptation to rob; stress comes out on kids; lessen the options of finding ways to relax; level of self esteem is low; not much hope; no resources within the community to share; no reason to plan; live day to day no political power; feeling of POWERLESSNESS leaves the community open to exploitation; low standards accepted;.	can cause poverty; can increase poverty; can strain services that are already limited ; can't intervene early, because serious cases take up energy; more enabling because energies go into survival; harder to get help; waiting lists; high tolerance of drunkenness & nerve tablets; high level of excuses made for drunkenness etc., becomes a way if life.; not identified - nothing to compare it to.; sontimes seems too big to tackle; people have enough problems of their own	lessens motivation for recovery why bother?; harder to get what you need to recover; some types of addicts are scapegoated; go against the established order if you quit risk rejection; hard to get support for changing your life; no social alternatives; harder to go for treatment into a different area;



## CHAPTER 10

### TEN YEARS OLD - SUMMARY OF OUR CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

On 9th March, 1991, Ballymun Youth Action Project was ten years old. It didn't seem real that we had been in existence for so long, probably because it still feels so new, and so much of the work was only firmly established in the later years.

However during 1990 the birthday became quite a talking point. We were excited that the Project had actually managed to survive for 10 years, in spite of great difficulties. We also became aware that, coming up to the birthday none of the founder members were still involved. They had all moved on. Frank Deasy commented on this at the conference, highlighting this as a sign of success of the principles of the Project, that the ideas had survived and developed, not depending on personalities.

The decision to hold a conference to mark this occasion was a sign of maturity and confidence of Project members. All of us felt that the birthday should be marked, and that it should be celebrated. The way chosen would mix sharing and discussion with having a big party!

The group who organized the conference was a mixture of staff, committee, parents and participants. They decided not to have any big key speakers. They did not want a lecture format, *but* rather one where dialogue could take place among all those who attended. We were delighted to welcome people from all over Dublin, from Belfast, Waterford and London, to the weekend.

We had decided on three discussion topics for the workshops, topics which we felt were essential to the development of our philosophy. These topics were:

1. what do we mean by "*Community Response*"
2. the role of statutory agencies.
3. power/powerlessness

We recorded the feedback from all the workshops and summarised the discussions.

1. What do we mean by "*Community Response*"

Some of the groups had discussed why we need a community response at all. Such a response is needed because addicts are part of the community they live in. Addiction does not exist in a vacuum. People who live with this issues can appreciate the problems, and are in a better position to develop caring flexible approaches, based on trust. The community can provide continuity, and by accepting ownership of the problem are united in action. There is a sense of belonging. Working together gives

Power, bringing a true identification of needs and problems. The community was seen as the best place for an addict to recover.

Some of the discussion referred to the community as being like a large family. It can either support recovery, or enable addiction. A community working for recovery can best identify and own the needs of its own area.

*“Community Response”* means we have to acquire the skills necessary to make the best possible response. And we are willing to share our experiences, to become strong together. Its about self-help.

Through being involved, you become even more aware of what’s happening in your area, and you take more of an interest.

Community response means we have to let people know what we’re doing, and that we can create a safe environment to discuss problems and feelings.

Community response is everything about our community. There is need for more and more education about the drug problems. We are committed to one goal.

Ideally, agencies should work with us as part of the response - local people can only partially respond. This way can unite agencies and/or people.

This way is always developing and growing. It is not static. It is a full time commitment to individuals and issues.

It encourages a positive media approach, and good public relations work. It also brings us out of our own little community/family, to be link up with others. We can share our resources, skills and experience, and get to understand needs by responding together.

Community response provides better support that statutory bodies. It establishes links, and by its nature networks those together to form strength.

This response can only come from the community. It can’t be imposed. It is concerned with prevention and cures. Needs to work at being able to develop long term strategies, and crisis situations. It is more caring and friendly, and rebuilds self esteem.

We need to be aware of working in a professional way not like statutory agencies, but that we are disciplined, educated, responsible to our work, and accountable. We mean that confidentiality is respected, etc.

It can be a threat to established powers, because it is different and powerful.

This approach stops ignoring and denying the problem, and struggles to find ways to be effective in changing it. It is a struggle for change that makes a difference. The group saw Ballymun as having been forced to become one big self help group. It has identified and used its assets.

This approach is passionate.

One group summarised their discussion like this:

1. Emphasis on need for education on all levels including education of politicians;
2. Community is the only way forward, involving many groups, and those not involved in groups;
3. Lack of membership in groups does not mean there is apathy;
4. Networking empowers the community to make demands from government;
5. Community should be empowered to ask state bodies for help and not depend on latter's initiative;
6. State Bodies are necessary to deal with social problems;
7. Professional media approach with high standards;

*“Community Response”* means building the self esteem of the community. It means breaking the rules of DONT TALK, DONT TRUST, and DONT FEEL, and developing effective communication within the community, as well as with outside bodies. A community responses does not let statutory agencies off the hook, but asks them to work in a different way. It acknowledges the skills of some statutory agents.

The discussion posed questions about a WHOLISTIC approach to drug abuse. Participants posed questions about HOW we work with other groups, and emphasised that HOW the work is done is as important as the service.

Questions were also posed about the self help concept. Maybe the community should be a large self help group? Maybe statutory agencies should be there in a funding and consultancy fashion. It was pointed out that statutory funding IS public money. Maybe the State should make sure that services are provided nationally, but not necessary providing these services? Maybe the relationship should be an INTERDEPENDENT one?

The discussion also pointed out that we have to have patience with growth in the community. We have to build self confidence. It takes time.

## THE ROLE OF STATUTORY AGENCIES

A lot of anger and dissatisfaction was expressed with the statutory agencies, they were experienced *as* being inflexible and bureaucratic, with policies which are out of touch with the needs of communities. Funding regulations can be unrealistic, and can fail to acknowledge the work of community groups. However, participants stressed that statutory agencies have a lot of expertise to offer, and that individuals had contributed very well to the development of our community responses.

We need to continue to struggle to establish better communication with statutory bodies. One barrier identified as contributing to bad communication was language. People discussed how the language used by statutory bodies is often alien to community groups, and can be used to intimidate people.

Another barrier was that state bodies can come in with their own ideas and agenda, which immediately block a real sharing of initiatives. This works against the fact that none of us have any answers to the drug related problems, and that we are all equals in this field. Our responsibility is to bring our skills and expertise, offer them, listen to others, and discover how they can go together, in the past, too many agencies came to discussions with set ideas, and this has blocked finding new, creative ways, for change which makes a difference.

There was a strong feeling that the relationship between statutory and voluntary is also hampered by the fact that the purse strings are held by the statutory bodies. They make decisions about where the money goes. Too often these decisions are made with inadequate understanding of community work needs, and with unrealistic conditions attached. Community groups have to fight very hard to get resources for worthwhile projects, and many felt that statutory bodies attempted to keep control of groups by the threat of withdrawal of funds. This is not an equal working partnership, and encourages dynamics within the interaction which are rigid, defensive and dysfunctional.

Another factor which hampered the building of a functional relationship was the rigidity, and inflexibility, of some statutory bodies. This led for example to individuals who came to look for help being fitted into a programme not designed to meet their particular needs, because it was the programme decided upon. It was the experience also of people at the conference that the flexibility led to lack of constructive, creative development, because of how things have to be documented or accounted for. Statutory bodies do not, in the main, appreciate the changing nature of community work, and how needs can change, or how quickly they can emerge.

Some people also felt that state bodies did not appreciate the worth of voluntary

bodies, or the expertise they contain. The feeling of the conference was that without local groups, the state bodies could not function. There was a suggestion that all community groups in the country should go on strike!!!!

The participants stated that state bodies are there to serve the community. Yet some of the experience of the conference was that state bodies seem to want to take over projects and control them. People asked why this was so.

People want more co-operation from these agencies, and it was agreed that they can offer a lot to the community if they work WITH us. However, state services are hampered by structures and bureaucracy. They have a narrow view of management and job descriptions. Decisions made by state bodies are made at a political level instead of community level. This means that power and vested interests are important in these agencies.

Most of those involved in state bodies come from a different background from the people in communities they serve. The middle class/working class divide was obvious, and is a major reason why state bodies need to learn to listen more and be prepared to let community have ownership of its services.

It was suggested that the Dept of Environment should have a bigger role to play in responding to drug related issues.

Being able to constructively criticise the statutory bodies was important, because we need them to work with us to make our response stronger. They are part of the community, and have skills and resources, therefore we need to struggle to improve the relationship between these bodies and community responses. It was stressed that very good relationships exist at ground level, among many of the workers. However, it was stated that was not good enough. The relationship needs to be at organisational and policy making levels also, to become more equal. It is because the state bodies are part of the community response that we need to keep communication lines open, even if they don't seem to be anxious to communicate with us. Sometimes it can be hard to identify the people who make the decisions.

It is important, dealing with addiction, that we do not get into power struggles. Power struggles feed addiction, and we have a responsibility to evaluate our relationships to ensure that this does not happen. We must keep working on our relationships with state bodies. We ask them to change, to co-operate more with us, instead of treating us with suspicion, and picking our brains." One participant described this as "*piggy backing on the voluntary agencies*." We say that this can't happen - they're too heavy! But we would be stronger if they would pull with us.

It was noted with great disappointment that the attendance of statutory bodies at the

conference was very poor. The good-on-the-ground working relationships between YAP staff and state bodies was evident, as most of those workers attended and participated fully. However, those in positions to make decisions did not attend. They missed a glorious opportunity to learn about community response.

In conclusion, the conference asked the statutory bodies to:

- be willing to co-operate
- listen better
- respect our expertise
- be more flexible
- take some risks with us
- make policies clearer

consider how much disruption may be caused to  
community work by shifting workers around.

## **POWER/POWERLESSNESS**

Power comes from belief and confidence in community. Powerlessness need not be a negative experience. It makes us more aware of our problems, and spurs us on to find ways to respond. Some participants felt that the experience of powerlessness enables people to take control. There was agreement that power will not be given to us; we have to take it. We need to be aware of what we can change. Each of us individually can change ourselves. We can challenge clichés (such as “these people”), eliminate barriers. Personal power is a personal decision to retain or give away.

The power is with the state bodies when it comes to finance. In this area we can feel very powerless. Sometimes we feel forced to compromise, in order to get money. Rural areas experience similar powerlessness. This is not confined to Dublin.

In the community as with individual and a family, we have the choice to ignore our powerlessness, or to admit to it. Having the choice to deal with the problem, is itself a help towards powerfulness. Power comes from co-operation. We are forced to co-operate when tackling severe problems.

The use of our vote was discussed. People do not use their vote effectively. It can be a tool to make politicians pay attention to our community. The vote can be used against uncaring politicians.

Powerlessness is created by the government and is not confined to Ballymun. Questions were raised about can we compromise in contracts etc. Is this not an admission of powerlessness?

The importance of education was stressed by these workshops. Education gives people power, and very young people can have power if through education their level of knowledge and awareness is raised.

Our powerlessness is not a fault. It is a result of being downtrodden. We give power to others. We need to stop accepting being dumped on, and know our own feelings.

The conference felt that the presence of YAP means that we have power. Power comes from believing in our community, and that change can happen, and is happening.

## **Appendix 1.**

### ***DRUGS***

A group of parents from all parts of Ballymun have organised the following meetings to provide General Information and Advice on Drugs, for parents and for young people.

VENUE: Girls Comprehensive TIME: 8 PM.

25th February: General Information, and Advice on Drug  
Wednesday Taking and Young People.

SPEAKERS: Audery Kilgallon, Jervis  
Street, Drug Clinic.

4th MARCH: Alcohol Use and Abuse. Prescribed Drugs  
Wednesday (Valium, Sleeping Tablets etc.)

SPEAKERS: Derek Hammond, Alcoholic  
Rehabilitation Centre.  
Ballymun Psychiatric Clinic.

11th MARCH: How can the Community responded to the  
needs of young people?

General Discussion

CHAired BY:  
Andy Conway, Child Guidance Clinic.  
Bob Rooney, Boys Comprehensive.

AIMS: To try and Organise Community  
Alternatives for the Young, by the Young and  
their Parents.

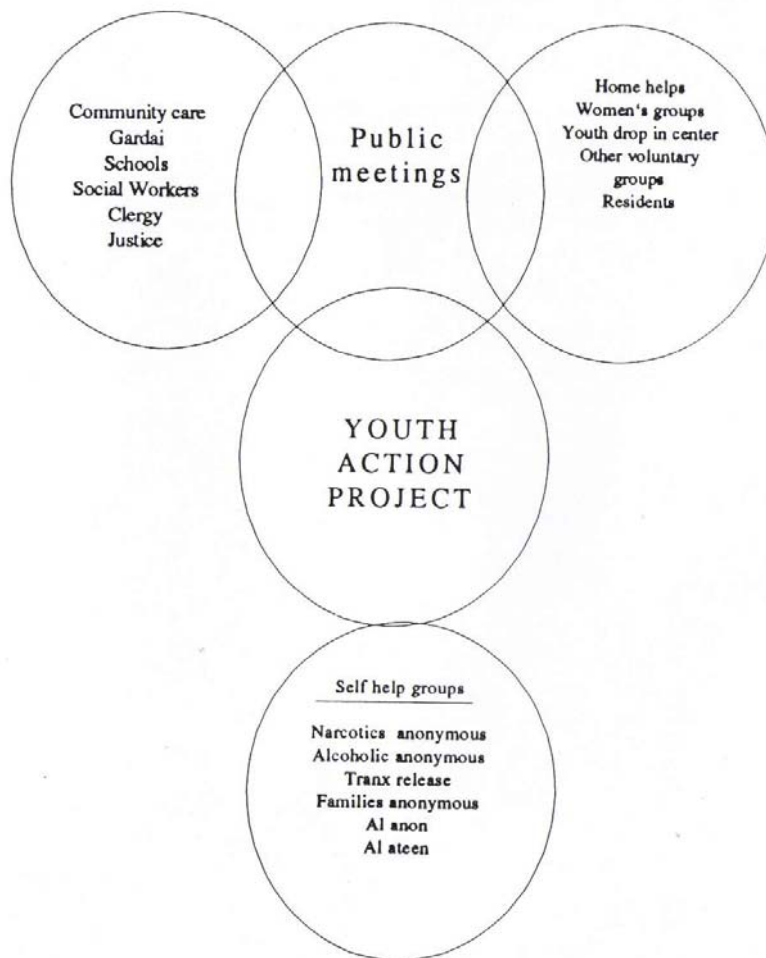
ALL INTERESTED GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS  
INVITED

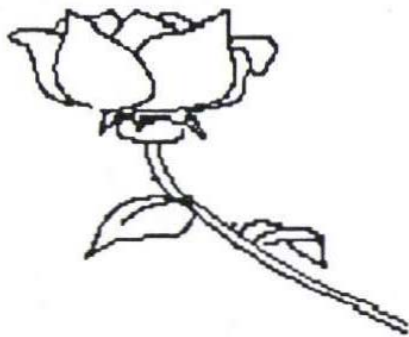


## APPENDIX....( 2)

### POSSIBLE MODEL STRUCTURE

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For a few years, we had no logo which could adequately depict the Youth Action Project. We weren't happy with anything suggested. Until the rosebud.

A rosebud is very beautiful. It a sign of love and care. It is delicate yet very strong. It is not yet a full flower, but we can see the promise of that flower, if the bud is well looked after so that it can grow. The rosebud also has thorns, which protects it as it grows.

We decided that yes, this was a sign that adequately depicted the Youth Action Projects' work.

The rosebud was suggested and designed by a young Ballymun woman, Sandra Brennan

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